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## GENERAL INFORMATION

*Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors* advances the study of college fraternities and sororities through a peer-reviewed academic journal promoting scholarly discourse among partners invested in the college fraternal movement. The vision of *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors* is to serve as the premier forum for academic discourse and scholarly inquiry regarding the college fraternity and sorority movement.

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### **SUBMISSIONS:**

*Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors* accepts submissions focused on articulating research involving fraternity and sorority members at the collegiate, alumni, inter/national organization, and volunteer advisory levels. Manuscripts should be written for the student affairs generalist who has broad responsibility for educational leadership, policy, staff development, and management. Articles on specialized topics should provide the generalist with an understanding of the importance of the program to student affairs overall and fraternity/sorority advising specifically.

Research articles for *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors* should stress the underlying issues or problems that stimulated the research; treat the methodology concisely; and, most importantly, offer a full discussion of results, implications, and conclusions. In the belief that AFA readers have much to learn from one another, we also encourage the submission of thoughtful, documented essays or historical perspectives.

Visit [www.afa1976.org](http://www.afa1976.org) for more detailed submission guidelines.

**OUTGOING EDITOR'S NOTES**  
**GEORGIANNA L. MARTIN, PH.D., *ORACLE* EDITOR**

After four years of serving as *Oracle* Editor, I am pleased to be passing the baton to my colleague and friend Dr. Jim Barber of the College of William and Mary. Jim is a familiar face to AFA and brings with him a wealth of experience with *Oracle* including serving as an Associate Editor for the last four years and serving as an Editorial Board member for nine years prior to his editorial term. My excitement for the future of *Oracle* is palpable; I have no doubt that Jim will continue to serve *Oracle* and the Association well. Perhaps most importantly, I have faith in Jim's ability to continue to strive for high standards in fraternity/sorority research; this is a charge that has driven *Oracle*, and the scholars who have worked with it, since its inception.

Over the four years that I have served as Editor for *Oracle* and during the three years prior to that when I served as an Associate Editor for the journal, I have watched our young journal increase in the number of submissions we receive, increase in the quality of the research being conducted, and increase in the diversity of research methods and topics explored. For example, over the last 11 years, *Oracle* has published research employing a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods, research using historical methods, a variety of content analysis studies, and mixed methods research. In fact, the current issue includes mixed methods research, document analysis, and quantitative research. At times we have lamented that we needed more rigorous quantitative research; I'm happy to say that in this issue we have three quality quantitative studies! Of course, the high quality qualitative studies we've published over the years have added a depth of understanding to the fraternal experience that we simply haven't had in prior decades. Although issues such as alcohol misuse and hazing remain important areas of research and practice, we are no longer a field that only produces research on these topics. The diversity of topics researched and published in *Oracle* has come a long way. And yet, we still have room to grow!

In this issue of *Oracle*, we have five original research articles that challenge us to reconsider preconceived notions, think outside the box, and continue asking thought-provoking questions to further advance the quality of the fraternal experience for its members. First, Ashley Tull and Andrew Shaw's article titled *Universally Espoused Fraternal Values on College and University Campuses: Commonplace or Coincidence?* uses a document analysis approach to explore the types of espoused values predominantly White fraternities hold and how these values can be classified along a continuum of universal values. Their study offers a rich look at the purported values of 75 fraternal organizations. Next, Daniela Véliz-Calderón and Elizabeth J. Allan use a mixed-methods approach in their article *Defining Hazing: Gender Differences*. In this study, they explore the ways in which study participants provide self-definitions of hazing and gender patterns and differences across these definitions. This study offers a solid example of mixed-methods research and its utility in practice. In *Devising and Testing a Measure of Fraternal Sisterhood*, Joshua Schutts, Gentry McCreary, and Sarah Cohen explore the construct of sisterhood through creating and testing their own instrument. This type of research is particularly rare and exciting due to the time, energy, and skillset required to devise and test one's own instrument. *Devising and Testing* extends Cohen, McCreary, and Schutts' (2017) article published last summer in *Oracle*. These authors' two articles taken together leave an important mark on our field in understanding and measuring the often amorphous concept of sisterhood. Next, Donald Mitchell, Jr., John Gipson, JaKia Marie, and Tiffany Steele's article titled *Intersectional Value? A Pilot Study Exploring Educational Outcomes for African American Women in Historically Black Sororities Versus Non-Historically Black*

*Sororities* responds to the growing body of literature in the field on the “value-added” component of fraternal organizations by exploring educational outcomes. Their article also adds to the limited body of research exploring the experiences of African American women in historically Black sororities. Finally, Rebecca Ortiz and Bailey Thompson’s article titled *Risky Recruitment: How Rape Myth Acceptance among Potential New Sorority Members is Related to Their Efficacy to Prevent Sexual Assault and Perceptions of University Sexual Assault Reporting* is both timely and relevant. This study explores how sorority new members’ perceptions of rape myths influence their efficacy and challenges campus professionals to dispel dangerous rape myths and clarify institutional reporting procedures for new students. Congratulations to all of our authors in this Issue for their high quality and impactful research!

# UNIVERSALLY ESPOUSED FRATERNAL VALUES ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES: COMMONPLACE OR COINCIDENCE?

ASHLEY TULL, SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY,  
AND ANDREW SHAW, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

*The purpose of the present study was to examine the espoused values of 75 predominately White national fraternities. This article reports values types espoused by college fraternities, as well as their classification along a well-defined and recognized continuum of universal values. Universal classification types included self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation.*

Fraternities on college and university campuses espouse a variety of values that are openly communicated to their membership and larger publics. The degree to which these values are in line with a well-defined and universally recognized system of values is unknown. Values have been described as universal because they are grounded in the needs of individuals with regard to biological, social, survival, and welfare needs (Schwartz, 2012). Values have also been examined cross-culturally with each of the four values types examined in the present study, universally present in all, from hundreds of samples from 82 countries (Bilsky, Janick, & Schwartz, 2011; Bond et al., 2004; Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008; Schwartz, 2012).

The purpose of the present study was to learn what types of espoused values fraternities possess and to best determine how these values can be classified along a continuum of universal values that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries. To conduct the present study, we closely examined the literature on fraternal values, college student values, and values theory. We then developed and tested a classification system to best categorize fraternal values along a continuum based on four major themes that included: self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation. These four values were selected as they are commonly found in the literature on universally accepted values and have been found common across at least 82 countries to date (Schwartz, 2012). These appear as the most widely cited in the values literature.

Though they are not specific to fraternities and sororities, they served as a good measure for examining the degree to which these fraternal values aligned with those that are universally accepted.

## Fraternality Values

The degree to which values held by members of social fraternities are alike or different from their non-fraternal student counterparts or non-student counterparts is not fully known. Previous research has found that the values held by fraternity members are positively associated with greater levels of interpersonal relationships and volunteerism and civic engagement; increased interest in making donations to causes; greater engagement in co-curricular activities as a student; and general higher educational achievement (e.g., see, Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; Hayek, Carini, O'Day, & Kuh, 2002; Matney et al., 2016; Whipple & Sullivan, 1998). Examples for espoused fraternal values (all of which were included in our study) include: friendship, knowledge, service, morality, and excellence (Phi Gamma Delta, 2016); learning, ethical leadership, exemplary character, and brotherhood (Phi Kappa Tau, 2016); and learning, friendship, and justice (Sigma Chi, 2016).

Researchers have also found that strides need to be made in several other lesser-enacted values relating to “addressing alcohol abuse; promoting academic achievement; and, fostering interactions with diverse peers” (Asel

et al., 2009, p. 8). Previous research has also found that values of fraternity members may not be in keeping with the intellectual values of college, attitude, or value formation of college students (Baier & Whipple, 1990). Fraternities have been described as providing incentives “to protect oneself and the family (fraternity) from new ideas and people with different likes, dislikes, ethnicities, economic status or cultural backgrounds” (p. 52).

The congruence between espoused fraternal values and those that are enacted has received little attention in the literature. One study examined enacted values for both fraternity and sorority organizations (Matthews et al., 2009). Fraternity and sorority members espoused values related to civic engagement, commitment to organization, fostering community, integrity, and pursuit of knowledge were examined. These same members were observed in public spaces on campus enacting values related to academic excellence, alcohol abuse, commitment to organization, connectedness, homogeneity, and pride in alma mater (Matthews et al., 2009). This raises the question as to how much espoused values are enacted by members of fraternal groups and the gap between.

Espoused and enacted values can also be affected by the overall culture of a college or university campus, beyond one’s affiliation with a fraternal organization. Pike (2000) stated, “whether membership in a fraternity or sorority hinders student development by deemphasizing academic experiences/achievement and emphasizing behaviors that are not conducive to learning, may depend on the institutional culture within which fraternities and sororities exist” (p. 137). For members of college fraternities, this can mean they operate under multiple values systems on a personal and organizational level at the same time.

### **College Student Values**

Any study of college student values

(fraternity/sorority associated or not) should provide context for these concepts holistically and not completely separate those examined for fraternity/sorority students. The degree to which values held by college students are alike or different from their non-student counterparts is not fully known. This is particularly true for those students who are of *traditional* college age (often between the ages of 18–24) (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Passmore, 2015; Renn & Reason, 2013). What has been studied more specifically are the effects of held values by college students on their behaviors while in college. The overall visible enacted values of a collegiate environment may significantly affect the values of college students. This is particularly true with regard to an individual’s values system and their “attitudes towards multiculturalism, diversity and drinking behavior” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2006, p. 8). The degree to which the college environment affects a student’s experience may rely heavily on their ability to keep and maintain open sets of beliefs and values relative to their experiences in diverse settings. Keeping an open set of beliefs and values may be critical to their experiences in a diverse college setting (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2006).

Students’ interest and level of participation in co-curricular activities (such as fraternity membership) may be connected to their personally held values; or, in many cases, these values may be further developed even if they were not a primary motivator in students’ decisions to join such an organization (Holloway, 2003). What is clear, is that college students arrive on campus with a set of values that may or may not be open (or consistent) with the values of other students on campus (Knox, Zusman, & Cooper, 2001). Peer culture has been identified as an influential mode “of lifestyle, language, values, and behavior,” (Dalton & Crosby, 2010, p. 4). This culture can even be further played out with open or closed systems of values based on membership in particular fraternal organizations.

Since early 2000, the incongruence of enacted values of fraternity members has

received considerable attention. This attention has particularly centered on calls for a return to values based activities in response to excessive and dangerous use of alcohol and other substances (Franklin Square Group, 2003). This return to values congruence has also involved leaders of national umbrella organizations for fraternities, such as the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), as well as college and university presidents. The degree to which congruence is entirely possible has been debated by some in the literature (e.g., see, McCreary, 2014; Schutts, 2013; Veldkamp & Bureau, 2012).

### Values Theory

Values theory (VT) has been defined as, “the study of the worth or value of ideas, things, people, or anything else. VT aims to understand how, why and to what degree individual people or groups (organizations) value anything” (MBA Brief, 2017, para. 1). Values theory has adopted characteristics of many theorists over time. Each value holds varying degrees of importance based on their contextual relevance and effects. These have been characterized by six main features according to Schwartz (2012):

- Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect,
- values refer to desirable goals that motivate action,
- values transcend specific actions and situations,
- values serve as standards or criteria,
- values are ordered by importance relative to one another, and
- the *relative* importance of multiple values guides actions. (pp. 3–4)

While the above values characteristics are not presented in any particular order, the concept of values and their adoption has been described on many levels for both individuals and groups. Additionally, these values are said to maintain both individual liberties and respect for the rights of others (Holloway, 2003). Goal types and

motivations behind them have been described as distinguishing characteristics between each of the six main features for values as presented above. Values theory has also defined 10 broadly accepted universal values. They are identified as universal for the requirements that they meet for individuals, across cultures, with regard to “biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and welfare needs of groups” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 4). The 10 broadly accepted universal values are included below, along with related concepts in parentheses, important for more clearly defining each value:

- Self-Direction (independent thought and action: choosing, creating, exploring)
- Stimulation (excitement, novelty, and challenge in life)
- Hedonism (pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself)
- Achievement (personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards)
- Power (social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources)
- Security (safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self)
- Conformity (restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms)
- Tradition (respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one’s culture or religion provides)
- Benevolence (preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the ‘in group’))
- Universalism (understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of *all* people and for nature). (Schwartz, 2012, pp. 5–7)

The universal values identified above, as well as the related concepts for each, played an important role in the development of our own classification system for the present study. These values “strongly support the idea that

human values form the motivational continuum postulated by the theory” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 12). The values used in this study as outlined by Schwartz are widely used and have been tested in many countries.

### Theoretical Framework

Schwartz’s (2012) *Theoretical Model of Relations Among Ten Motivational Types of Values* served as a theoretical framework for our study. The model provided a method for organizing the ten universal values under four broader themes that served as a values continuum. These four broader themes, the ten values that fall under them, and their relationships with one another are outlined below. Each of the 4 themes includes two to four of the motivational types along with their definitions.

#### *Self-Enhancement*

- a. power and achievement: social superiority and esteem;
- b. achievement and hedonism: self-centered satisfaction;

#### *Openness to Change*

- c. hedonism and stimulation: a desire for affectively pleasant arousal;
- d. stimulation and self-direction: intrinsic interest in novelty and mastery;
- e. self-direction and universalism: reliance upon one’s own judgment and comfort with the diversity of interests;

#### *Self-Transcendence*

- f. universalism and benevolence: enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests;
- g. benevolence and tradition: devotion to one’s in-group;
- h. benevolence and conformity: normative behavior that promotes close relationships;

#### *Conservation*

- i. conformity and tradition: subordination of self in favor of socially imposed expectations;
- j. tradition and security: preserving existing social arrangements that give certainty to life;
- k. conformity and security: protection of order and harmony in relations;
- l. security and power: avoiding or overcoming threats by controlling relationships and resources. (Schwartz, 2012, pp. 9–10)

This model informed the design of our classification system for fraternal values that will be discussed further within the methods section of this study.

### Method

Based on a review of the literature on fraternal values, college student values, values theory, and Schwartz’s (2012) *Theoretical Model of Relations Among Ten Motivational Types of Value*, we developed the following research question to guide our study: What are the espoused values of national collegiate fraternities and how are they classified along a well-defined and recognized continuum of universal values? Document analysis (a form of content analysis methodology) was used for the review and classification of values found for those fraternities examined on websites for each organization administered by their national offices (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). Content analysis has been described as an empirically grounded method that allows for inference, reduction of data, sampling, and unitization processes (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). Espoused values were most often located under a tab prominently labeled values on each website, and “because institutional websites are vehicles of communication that employ textual and visual components, content analysis is well-suited to attend to these artifacts” (p. 506). Fraternities included the 69 organizations that are current

members of the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), as well as six additional national fraternities who are not affiliated with the NIC. Those that were included in the present study who do not hold membership in NIC included: Alpha Phi Delta, Kappa Sigma, Lambda Chi Alpha, Phi Delta Theta, Sigma Lambda Beta, Sigma Phi Delta, and Tau Kappa Epsilon. NIC fraternities were included as this organization serves as a national trade association for fraternities and represents the largest group of organizations in postsecondary education. The additional fraternities were similar to those who hold membership in NIC and several had been members previously. Membership in NIC is not a requirement for fraternal organizations. We examined the websites for each fraternity to obtain their espoused values.

A total of 351 values were reported for the fraternities examined in this study. These values do not represent unique values, but rather a total of the number of values found for each fraternity. In many cases, values were similar across fraternities examined in our study, with many using the exact or similar language to convey them. This represented an average of 4.68 per organization, with 25 fraternities having the lowest reported with three values and three fraternities having the highest reported with ten values. The mode for number of values reported by organizations was three.

We first developed a values classification system and database for each of the reported values for fraternal organizations examined in the study (Tull, 2011). The database included all 75 fraternities in the study organized alphabetically (by use of the Greek alphabet). We then reviewed the fraternal values database on two occasions to test for internal validity, each time classifying each value under one of the values themes presented in the theoretical framework that guided the study. We used the ten values and their relationships with one another (outlined above) to aid in our categorization of values into one of the four themes. Values were assigned to

only one of the four themes. These values themes included: self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation.

Representative espoused values that were classified for our study under self-transcendence included: citizenship, community service, responsibility, and engagement. Representative espoused values that were classified for our study under self-enhancement included: scholarship, academic achievement, leadership, character, and personal development. Representative espoused values that were classified for our study related to conservation included: brotherhood, loyalty, tradition, commitment, and fidelity. Representative espoused values that were classified for our study under openness to change included: self-support, integrity, wisdom, perseverance, and authenticity.

To test the fraternal values classification system for reliability we coded half of the values in the database on two separate occasions. This involved our initial coding and a follow up coding that occurred one month later. We recoded 94% of the fraternal values under the same values themes after the follow up coding. For the recoding process, every other odd numbered (from our alphabetical list) fraternity in the database was selected. This process was conducted to test the reproductively and stability of the values classification system that we developed. We then used a statistical method (Cohen's Kappa) to analyze interrater reliability among the fraternal values that we classified earlier. After running the Cohen's Kappa, we obtained a coefficient of .93. The coefficient was achieved by analyzing coding in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 19.0), which was done after three independent reviews of a systematic sample of 33 fraternal values, drawn from the total sample of 351 fraternal values. We developed the systematic sample by selecting every seventh fraternity from the list developed alphabetically from the fraternal values system database. We coded the values for these organizations for our analysis. The

reliability coefficient we obtained for our study signified reasonable confidence in the fraternal values system that we created (Frankel & Wallen, 2003).

## Results

In response to the research question developed for this study, frequencies for the 351 espoused values that were classified showed the greatest number under self-transcendence (120 values, 34.1%) associated with universalism, benevolence, tradition and conformity; followed by conservation (110 values, 31.3%) associated with conformity, tradition, security and power; followed by self-enhancement (80 values, 22.7%) associated with power, achievement and hedonism; and openness to change (41 values, 11.6%), associated with hedonism, stimulation, self-direction and universalism. Espoused value means by type included: 1.17 for self-enhancement, 1.98 self-transcendence, 1.79 for conservation, and 1.24 for openness to change.

Frequency data are provided for all fraternities with regard to how we classified them along the continuum of universal values (see Table 1). Of the 75 fraternal organizations examined for this study, 61 (81.33%) had values that were classified under self-transcendence; 60 (80%) had values that were classified under self-enhancement; 59 (78.66%) had values that were classified under conservation; and 33 (44%) had values that were classified under openness to change. Forty-one (54.66%) had no values classified under openness to change; 15 (20%) had no values classified under conservation; 14 (18.66%) had no values classified under self-enhancement; and

13 (17.33%) had no values classified under self-transcendence.

The majority of fraternities examined for this study had espoused values related to self-transcendence, self-enhancement, and conservation. Few fraternities had espoused values related to openness to change. A discussion follows for each of the values themes examined in our study as well as outlined differences between these values with universally held values.

## Discussion

### *Self-Transcendence*

Eighty-one percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of self-transcendence. For members of college fraternities, these values may be more heavily emphasized as they are related to enhancing others vs. selfish interests, commitment to one's group, and normative actions that promote more insular relationships and bonds between members. The results of our study included the largest number of fraternal values being classified under the values theme of self-transcendence. These values may be commonly espoused and enacted by members of college fraternities and can be central reasons for students seeking membership in these groups (Matthews et al., 2009; McCollum, 2005).

### *Self-Enhancement*

Eighty percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of self-enhancement. Though the literal definition of these values (according to Schwartz, 2012) might appear self-centered

**Table 1**

*Frequencies for Fraternal Organizations Examined in Study Fraternity Values Classification System*

<u>Values Themes</u>	<u>Self-Enhancement</u>	<u>Openness to Change</u>	<u>Self-Transcendence</u>	<u>Conservation</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Leadership Position(s)</u>
Total Values	80	41	120	110	351	President
Percentage	22.79	11.68	34.18	31.33	100	No formal role

and hedonistic, values under self-enhancement appear to be in line with the general goals of participation in postsecondary education. For members of college fraternities, these values may be less emphasized as fewer individualistic values appear to be more espoused in favor of more group, normative, or social values that prevail. This would be the case with the results of our study, where we classified the largest number of fraternal values under the theme of self-transcendence. These values are more centered on conformity to group values over more self-centered values.

### **Conservation**

Seventy-nine percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of conservation. Like those fraternal values related to self-transcendence, values related to conservation have social aspects. For conservation related values, a focus on social favorability and conformity are important (McCollum, 2005; Schwartz, 2012). Protecting group norms and traditions takes precedence over more individualistic values, such as those discussed above under self-transcendence. This has been described as providing security and protection for those who hold these values, particularly for in-group settings, such as college fraternities (Schwartz, 2012).

### **Openness to Change**

Forty-four percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of openness to change. The findings of the present study (particularly related to the theme of openness to change) appear to be confirming of past research related to the insular affect that membership in a college fraternity can have on undergraduates (Dugan, 2008; Matney et al., 2016). This study has found further evidence that appeared consistent when examining openness to change on a universal continuum of values, one that transcends cultures and

geographic boundaries. Fraternity membership has been described as “protect[ing] oneself and the family (fraternity) from new ideas and people with different likes, dislikes, ethnicities, economic status or cultural backgrounds” (Baier & Whipple, 1990, p. 52).

### ***Differences Between Fraternal Values and Universal Values***

In previous cross-cultural studies, benevolence, universalism, and self-direction have been found to be at the top of the values hierarchy (Schwartz, 2012). These values, associated with openness to change, are at the bottom of the values hierarchy in the present study of college fraternal values. On the other hand, power, tradition, and stimulation (values associated with self-enhancement and conservation) have been found at the top of the values hierarchy in the present study, while they have been found at the bottom of the values hierarchy universally. This is of particular concern to us as researchers as “this implies that the aspects of human nature and of social functioning that shape individual value priorities are widely shared across cultures” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 17), although this was not found to be the case in our study of college fraternity members.

### ***The Relationship Between Fraternal Values and Those Found Universally***

The results of the present study demonstrate common connections (although likely not intentional) between values espoused to by college fraternities and those found universally. This is important as college fraternities are significant leadership development opportunities for their members. This is also an important concept that should not be overlooked by those who work directly with fraternity chapters on a campus or national level. This would include chapter advisors, fraternity volunteers, campus based fraternity/sorority life professionals, and staff from fraternity international headquarters. Values development activities should be more

fully integrated between both curricular and co-curricular activities and more fully supplement connections between college and life beyond, both personally and professionally for members. The connection between espoused fraternal values and those universally held by members of most societies are common and should be further developed in college and beyond.

### **Recommendations**

Fraternal organizations each have their own distinct sets of espoused values. These values help them to shape their identity, attract members, and build relationships. These organizations by their founding and development have identified high ideals, goals, aspirations, and values. Although many of these have not been developed through any alignments with universally accepted values, they might be well informed by these in the future. We recommend that fraternities examine the alignment of their values with those that are most universally accepted. This can help fraternities best prepare their members for personal and professional success beyond college. Additionally, we would recommend to any groups that may be establishing themselves or who will in the future, to carefully examine their espoused values against those that are universally accepted.

Further quantitative and qualitative research should be conducted to examine how undergraduate fraternity members are enacting their values. This research would provide greater data on curricular and co-curricular activities that might be better promoted as best practices for members of fraternal organization and for institutions that host them. Further research would be of particular importance for those values deemed important for student success and personal and professional development.

We would recommend strengthening the role of fraternity advisors (on the chapter, institutional, and national levels) in becoming more knowledgeable on fraternal values and

their effects on peer culture and their members as transmitters (Dalton & Crosby, 2010). With strengthened roles and knowledge of fraternal values come important opportunities for promoting environments for student success and professional development of members of fraternities on college and university campuses (Matney et al., 2016).

The results of this study have demonstrated that many fraternities espouse similar or overlapping values. In some cases, fraternities regularly used the same labels (e.g., brotherhood, service, scholarship, etc.). In other cases they referred to similar values traits through the use of different descriptors. Those who work with fraternities, and even those who do not, would observe that values systems are more alike than they are different, in many cases. Advisors who work with fraternities at the international/national, campus, or chapter level should capitalize on these values similarities for greater shared expectations. They can also work collaboratively to draw specific connections both on an intra and inter-group level and with the colleges and universities that host chapters.

Although our study focused exclusively on member fraternities of the North-American Interfraternal Conference, with a few others added, we recommend replicating our study format for closer examination of other fraternities and sororities on college and university campuses. Groups that could be examined in the future include: the National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Panhellenic Association (a group of 18 international fraternities and sororities); the National PanHellenic Conference (a group of 26 international sororities for women); the National Pan-Hellenic Council (a group of nine historically African American fraternities and sororities); the National Multicultural Greek Council (a group of 11 multicultural fraternities and sororities); and the National Association of Latin Fraternal Organizations (a group of 17 Latino/a fraternities and sororities).

## **Limitations**

Several limitations for our study deserve mention. Each of these are important for understanding the content and discussion contained within. Each of us, as researchers, are members of college fraternities and both of our organizations were included in the present study. These include Lambda Chi Alpha and Pi Kappa Phi respectively. By conducting a qualitative study (using content analysis) our findings are based on content extracted from web-based sources at a particular time. Though we believe them to be well kept and accurate, their accuracy is based on electronic sources. Additionally, we developed and tested a classification system for organizing college fraternal values according to four values themes found to be universal. We tested our classification system to ensure its reliability. Our classifications found in this study are our own, as others may classify them differently. Lastly, most fraternal organizations examined in our study (who are members of the NIC) have a social focus; however, a few have a focus on particular cultural identities or are more professionally aligned with fields of study in postsecondary education.

## **Conclusion**

College fraternities espouse many values that help them communicate their customs, philosophies, and principles both internally and externally. Fraternal values have not been the focus of much research in the past. Our goal was to carefully examine what values fraternities espouse, as well as how these might align with those that have been found, through previous research, to be universally accepted. Our study of 75 fraternities and their collective 351 values has provided a greater perspective on what fraternities hold as important as well as how their values align with those that are universal across cultures and geographic boundaries. In some cases, fraternities were found to have values in

each of the values themes (self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation) and in others they may have lacked any values in a particular values theme. We recommend that college fraternities seek new or continued balance between espoused values in each of the themes found to be universal in nature. By doing this, college fraternities can provide their members a richer experience while they are undergraduates as well as best prepare them for a lifelong affiliation and engagement with their organizations.

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## DEFINING HAZING: GENDER DIFFERENCES

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*This article provides an analysis of a sub-set of data gathered by Allan and Madden (2008) in the National Study of Student Hazing that included 11,482 survey responses from undergraduate students enrolled at 53 colleges and universities and more than 300 interviews with students and campus personnel at 18 of those institutions. Our analysis of the student interview data explored how students define hazing and the extent to which their definitions may be gendered. Binary constructions of harm, building friendship, and compulsion/opting are key themes described; implications and recommendations for practice and future research are also discussed.*

Psychological and physical harm are commonly reported outcomes of hazing, and sometimes this behavior can be deadly (Allan & Madden, 2012; Finkel, 2002; Nuwer, 2004, 2017). Public accounts of hazing deaths, sexual assaults, and other incidents continue to make national headlines in the U.S. and Canada. Generally defined as any activity expected of someone joining or maintaining membership in a group (such as a club, organization, or team) that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers, regardless of a person's willingness to participate, hazing can be understood within a spectrum of interpersonal violence (Allan & Madden, 2012; Allan, Payne, & Kerschner, 2016; Hoover & Pollard, 1999). As such, hazing impedes the missions of colleges and universities by threatening the health and safety of community members. Other potential consequences of hazing include student attrition, abusive school and campus climates, and negative publicity to name a few (Campus Safety, 2016; Nuwer, 1999, 2004, 2017). Stereotypes continue to shape perceptions of hazing as simply harmless antics and pranks and only a problem for fraternities. Such views are shortsighted and may jeopardize the health and safety of students and hinder the overall quality of learning environments in schools and postsecondary institutions. Professional staff and administrators who encounter hazing among students are often discouraged and perplexed by entrenched attitudes and beliefs that support a

culture where hazing can be normalized as part of college life (Allan & Madden, 2008, 2012).

### Significance

Perceptions of hazing are important because they provide insights about student expectations of group membership in the context of higher education and how students define hazing and understand its place in college life. Hazing occurs in a larger social context and intersects with power dynamics related to gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other aspects of identity (Allan & Kinney, 2017). Though both men and women report hazing experiences, data indicate that there are some gender-based differences (e.g., Allan & Madden, 2008, 2012; Nuwer, 2017) and that, of the hazing deaths documented, the vast majority are male students (e.g., Nuwer, 2017).

Underscoring conclusions drawn in other studies of hazing, a key finding from Allan and Madden's (2008) study was that while 55% of students belonging to student clubs, organizations, or teams experienced behavior that meets the definition of hazing, only one in ten identified it as such. Said differently, 90% of students who were hazed did not label their experiences as hazing. When students' definitions of hazing were explored in research interviews, they frequently used words and phrases like "initiation," "bonding," "tradition," and "building

group unity” as aliases for hazing. Additionally, students often failed to account for the power of coercion in peer group environments where there was a strong desire to belong. For instance, a student might have defined hazing as, “forcing someone to do something in order to become a member of a group,” but when asked to describe “force,” students typically offered depictions of physical force (e.g., being tied or taped up, held down, locked in car trunk or closet). Students often overlooked hazing if they perceived their peers were “choosing” to participate in the activities. However, when defining hazing, students rarely described the more nuanced power dynamics of group behavior where peer pressure and coercion can diminish the veracity of consensual behavior (Allan & Madden, 2008).

With increasing media coverage of hazing in both college and high school contexts, public attention to hazing and hazing prevention is growing. Analyzing how students define hazing, and the gendered nature of those definitions, may help illuminate why some students minimize and normalize hazing, adding to the knowledge-base about hazing and its prevention.

## Review of Literature

Although the practice of hazing has been documented for well over a century (e.g., see, Barber, 2012; Nuwer, 2000), the study of hazing is emergent. Hazing came into more public view with the death of a first-year college student in the late 1800s, and in 1905, *The New York Times* published the first documented newspaper account of hazing with the headline, “Hazing Kills Schoolboy” (Nuwer, 2000). Recently, headlines point to persistent problems with hazing and the tragic toll it can take in fraternities (Hayden, 2017) and in other organizations as well (Montgomery, 2012).

Studies of hazing based on a national sample have been few. Prior to Allan and Madden’s (2008) study, a pioneering 1999 study co-sponsored by Alfred University and the National

Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) explored experiences of hazing among varsity athletes in NCAA Division I athletic programs (Hoover, 1999). Data collected from middle school and high school athletes in the suburbs of New York City found that 17.4% had been subjected to practices that would qualify as hazing (Gershel, Katz-Sidlow, Small, & Zandieh, 2003). A random sample of undergraduates surveyed at one research university revealed 36% had participated in a hazing activity (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). At a different university, findings from a survey of 440 students found fraternity members experienced the greatest number of hazing behaviors, but that hazing was also reported in several other types of student groups (Owen, Burke, & Vichesky, 2008).

Some studies have examined hazing in particular contexts including within fraternities (Nuwer, 1990; Sweet, 1999) and sororities (Holmes, 1999; Lee-Olukoya, 2010; Shaw, 1992), among athletes (Johnson, 2007; McGlone, 2005; Waldron & Kowalski, 2009; Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011), in marching bands (Silveira & Hudson, 2015), and in the military (Keller et al., 2015). Other studies have established the occurrence of hazing in a wider range of student groups; however, as single-campus studies, the findings may reflect hazing within the context of a particular campus culture and may not be generalizable to a broader group of college students (Campo et al., 2005; Owen et al., 2008). A growing body of work examines hazing within historically Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) (e.g., Parks, Jones, Ray, Hughey, & Cox, 2015; Parks & Spencer, 2013). Specifically, Jones (2000) reported that BGLO fraternity men were strongly committed to pledging models that included “physical hardships” (p. 121), and Parks et al. (2015) argued that hazing in BGLOs was more violent in nature than their historically White peer organizations. Other accounts of the nature and prevalence of hazing have been depicted in the news and popular press. For example, author

and journalist Hank Nuwer (1999, 2004, 2017) has documented numerous hazing incidents spanning many decades.

A range of hazing behaviors has been documented in the literature. In a 2002 review, Finkel described common injuries and types of hazing practices including beating, paddling, whipping, and striking; blood pinning; branding, tattooing, cigarette burning, and burning; excessive calisthenics; confinement to restricted areas; consumption of nonfood substances; forced swimming and circumstances leading to drowning and near-drowning; blunt trauma from falls after having to climb roofs, ledges, and bridges; immersion in noxious substances; psychologic abuse; and sexual assaults. Sexualized and sexually abusive hazing has been a focus of scholarly attention (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002), and was also described extensively by Robinson (1998) and Stuart (2013), with Stuart describing how sexually exploitive hazing and sexual assaults served as a means for team leaders to disempower younger athletes by “feminizing them or otherwise challenging their ability to conform to a hegemonic masculine sports stereotype” (p. 374).

Hoover (1999) found that more than half of varsity athletes were involved in alcohol-related initiation activities; 20% were involved in activities labeled “unacceptable” because they carried a “high probability of danger or injury, or could result in criminal charges” (p. 10); and more than 65% reported involvement in “questionable activities” such as head shaving, personal servitude, sleep, food, or hygiene deprivation, consuming disgusting concoctions, or being forced to wear embarrassing clothing. Hoover and Pollard’s investigation (2000) of hazing among high school students in the U.S., grouped behaviors into three categories including: humiliation (i.e., socially offensive, isolating, or uncooperative behaviors); substance abuse (i.e., abuse of tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs); and dangerous hazing (i.e., hurtful, aggressive, destructive, and disruptive

behaviors). Overall, in their study, 48% of students belonging to groups reported being subjected to hazing, with 43% experiencing behaviors categorized as humiliating, 29% as potentially illegal, 23% abuse of substances, and 22% dangerous. Nearly ten years later, Allan and Madden’s (2008) study found that 47% of college students reported experiencing hazing during their high school years.

Student participation in hazing is sometimes justified by the claim that hazing promotes group cohesion (Allan & Madden, 2008; Keating et al., 2005). To test this claim, VanRaalte, Cornelius, Linder, and Brewer (2007) gathered data from 167 athletes representing a range of sports at six U.S. colleges and universities and found an inverse relationship between hazing activities and team cohesion in sport-related tasks. Yet some students to continue to cite “group bonding” as one reason for participating in hazing alongside feeling a sense of accomplishment and strength (Allan & Madden, 2012). Cimino (2011, 2013), drawing on perspectives from evolutionary psychology, contended that group solidarity and the cultivation of committed group members are adaptive outcomes of hazing and may explain student motivation for participating in hazing.

Some explorations of gender differences in hazing suggest that men are more often associated with hazing practices that demonstrate strength and dominance, sexually objectify women, and humiliate via same-sex sexual harassment and assault (e.g., Allan & DeAngelis, 2004; Allan & Kinney, 2017; Anderson, McCormack, & Lee, 2011; Johnson & Holman, 2004; Kirby & Wintrup, 2002; Stuart, 2013). In a study of female athletes, Johnson and Holman (2004) found that women tended to engage in less violent forms of hazing and were more likely to accept their peers’ decisions to avoid hazing. More recently, noting an increasing flexibility of gender norms, Anderson et al., (2011) concluded that as homophobic attitudes decreased, so did same-sex hazing behaviors for intercollegiate male athletes. These studies suggest that the power

abuses of hazing reflect larger social systems and the context in which hazing occurs.

As noted previously, researchers have identified a gap between students' firsthand experiences of hazing and their willingness to label it as such. Echoing results from the Alfred University-NCAA varsity athlete study (Hoover, 1999), Campo et al. (2005) found "a clear discrepancy between self-identification of participating in hazing and participating in hazing as defined by university policy" (p. 146). A similar pattern had emerged in a study of 6–12th graders in one school district where only 3% of the 22% who had experienced hazing with the potential for serious harm actually described the activities as "dangerous" (Gershel et al., 2003). Similarly, based on data from focus groups with student-athletes and coaches/administrators at one university, Crow and MacIntosh (2009) found a lack of correspondence between experiences of hazing and students' willingness to use the term "hazing" to describe those experiences. Some research indicates a possible explanation for the reported gap between experience of hazing and self-reports of hazing is that students ascribe to a narrow definition that emphasizes physically violent forms of hazing including being tied up, beaten, or sexually assaulted (e.g., Allan & Madden, 2008, 2012; Campo et al., 2005).

### **Gender Theory**

To further explore the ways in which students understand and define hazing, we drew upon gender theory for this analysis. Using this lens, it can be understood that people make assumptions about gender identity based on the perception of social cues and behaviors associated with what it means to be a woman (femininity) or man (masculinity) in a given society (Valian, 1999; 2005). Building on research in social psychology, Valian referred to these largely unconscious mental constructs as *gender schemas*. According to Allan (2004), "a social-constructionist view of gender posits that masculine and feminine behaviors are largely a result of learning what

is expected in a particular culture (rather than what is imprinted on one's genetic material)" (p. 279). These mental maps or gender schemas help individuals make judgments about how boys/girls or men/women should or ought to act in a given context. Gender schemas include expectations about male and female behavior and appearance. For example, the predominant schema of masculinity constructs the *real man* as someone who takes independent action, is a rational and logical thinker, is *in control*, and appears physically strong. In contrast, the predominant schema for femininity constructs the concept of womanhood in opposition to manhood (Gergen, 2009). For example, some girls learn at an early age that being too strong may be interpreted as non-feminine, and therefore *unattractive*. Largely, ideal femininity constructs women as nurturing, as communal, and as doing things out of concern or care for other people.

Although they are not necessarily operating at a conscious level, gender schemas are powerful because they help individuals interpret the social world and bring order to complexity by providing a means to categorize people and explain human behavior (Valian, 1999, 2005). Given this, college students are likely to employ gender schemas as they make sense of human behavior involved with hazing. Considering the predominant perceptions of gender differences in society, it follows that notions of gender may play a role in how hazing is understood and defined by college students. This study sought to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the role gender may play in how students define and make sense of hazing.

### **Research Design and Analysis**

Informed by public accounts and empirical research related to hazing, Allan and Madden (2008, 2012) designed a descriptive study to examine the occurrence of hazing among students involved with groups at multiple colleges and universities throughout the U.S.

More specifically, the investigators sought to examine the nature and extent of student hazing across a range of student clubs, organizations, and teams located at different types of four-year colleges and universities (e.g., public and private and research intensive universities and smaller colleges with a strong liberal arts tradition) and in different regions of the U.S. The study was a mixed-methods investigation where data were gathered by survey, interviews, and focus groups. A descriptive statistical approach was used to analyze the survey data as it is most appropriate when there is a shortage of facts or when previous findings are inconclusive (Frankel, 2003). Inductive analyses of qualitative data extended findings from the survey data in that investigation.

Student participants for the interviews were identified by a key contact (professional staff member) from student affairs departments at 18 U.S. colleges and universities located in five NASPA regions (see [www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/regions](http://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/regions)). In each case, the key contact was asked to identify student leaders who, in aggregate, would reflect a range of membership groups including: athletes, fraternities and sororities, resident assistants, student government, performing arts organizations, honor societies, recreation/sport clubs, and academic clubs. Of note, key contacts were not asked to identify students who had experienced hazing. Rather, Allan and Madden (2008, 2012) sought to interview students who were involved on campus and were likely to have an understanding of the predominant student culture, institutional history, and traditions.

Interviews were conducted in-person by the lead researchers and trained research assistants and ranged from 30–60 minutes in length. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by professional transcriptionists (Allan & Madden, 2008). For the purpose of the analysis described in this article, we sought to learn more about how college students defined hazing and to explore the extent to which

definitions of hazing may be gendered. Analysis was based on data produced from 188 student interviews conducted as part of the National Study on Student Hazing (Allan & Madden, 2008). Building on prior research (Hoover & Pollard, 1999, p. 4), we defined hazing as any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers, regardless of the person's willingness to participate. This does not include activities such as rookies carrying the balls, team parties with community games, or going out with your teammates, unless an atmosphere of humiliation, degradation, abuse or danger arises.

The research team for this analysis was comprised of the lead researchers from the national study and four education doctoral students from the University of Maine. Researchers began the coding process for this study with the entire set of student interviews ( $n = 188$ ). For the purpose of this study, we focused our specific analysis on the theme *defining hazing*. To establish inter-rater reliability, the research team analyzed a common subset of transcripts to begin the coding process and develop an emergent codebook. When agreement was reached about the preliminary codes for this subset of transcripts, the remaining transcripts were divided among four members of the research team. Each researcher read the transcripts separately and then met on four occasions to compare codes and clarify discrepancies. This peer debriefing is an important process for strengthening trustworthiness of the analysis.

Through the coding process, the following themes emerged: (a) binary constructions of harm, (b) bonding/building friendship, and (c) compulsion/opting out. These themes were then analyzed using the lens of gender schemas.

## Findings

### *Binary Constructions of Harm*

This analysis revealed that students described hazing activities in gendered terms that reflected

the binary of emotional/physical. When defining hazing, male students often invoked images of alcohol abuse and/or physical strength. Illustrating the latter, one fraternity member defined hazing in terms of his experience, which included “physical things we had to do - calisthenics with push-ups, sit ups, jumping jacks, and cardio.”

Physical activity was present in definitions of hazing provided by women, however, female students tended to describe physical activities differently. In this sample, female students described experiences of hazing that involved food or sleep deprivation. For example, one female student said hazing involved “being forced to eat certain things that are disgusting or being made to get up at all hours of the night.” Similar to male students, women also referenced hazing practices relative to alcohol consumption; however, female students were less likely to describe physical effects of excessive drinking as compared to male participants. Particularly, female students included alcohol consumption in their definitions of hazing, but tended to focus on the act of drinking, as opposed to the result of excessive drinking (e.g., vomiting and passing out). In sum, the research team noted differences between how male and female college students referenced physical strength and physical harm in their definitions of hazing. Male students in the study more frequently defined hazing experiences and activities as displays of physical strength and physical effects of alcohol abuse, while female students tended to focus more on physical effects of sleep deprivation or food-related hazing.

Both male and female participants described emotional harm from hazing. One female student described emotional harm of hazing in this way:

It was more psychological honestly. You just feel beat up psychologically. People constantly telling you to do this and this and you have to make decisions, snap decisions, and late nights. . . but it’s definitely a psychological hardship more than anything.

In contrast, when describing non-physical aspects of hazing, male students tended to focus on practices that humiliated others. We interpreted the inclusion of power and hierarchy within male college students’ definitions of hazing as evidence of how culture socially constructs femininity and masculinity. In American culture, masculinity is typically associated with attributes like being in control, strong, or dominant (Tong, 2009; Valian, 1999). As a way to describe the power imbalance between old and new members a male student stated:

I would say any sort of action whether it’s mental or physical or it is something that you have a group of whether its new members or whether it’s a requirement to join the group and you have people beneath you to kind of make them feel like there is this hierarchy of people. I’m above you and can make you do these things because I can; because you’re less than me. So we want to make you feel part of this group, and I’ve gone through it, and I can make you do it. I think that’s kind of where hazing comes in and the struggle for power and this is the way things are done. And you have to listen to me and I’m going to make you feel like this. . . and you have to do this and I don’t because I’m older and I’m going to make you.

Another male student described it this way:

Personally, describing hazing would be and I would say for all of the new guys on the team any downgrading job or...not necessarily job or making them perform specific tasks to you know just humiliate them in front of other people and examples...you know make somebody or some of the new guys get drunk or make fools out of themselves or run around naked or stuff like that.

In some cases, participants specifically pointed out gender differences in hazing. For instance, in trying to define hazing, one male student shared the following:

I guess any action intended or unintended

that causes physical or mental harm that can be done between new members or active members or something like that very very close to that... I think hazing is and what comes to me are the paddling or the walls sits or like studying tables late at night and *girls circling fat*<sup>1</sup> [emphasis added] and things like that. I guess in those are the ones that immediately pop into my head.

A female student described the implications of this type of practice in the following quote:

It happened once after the “circle of shame” and she was asked to do a line of coke that night and I could tell because one she was acting completely bizarre. I remember that she was wearing a skirt and one of the things I could see was the side of her leg and they’d taken a sharpie and marked it as cellulite.

Though both male and female students defined hazing in ways that invoked examples of physical and emotional harm, men were more likely to emphasize the harm from physical types of hazing including alcohol abuse. A closer look at student references to emotional or psychological harm revealed some gendered aspects of hazing where dominant beauty ideals for women can play a role in hazing.

### ***Bonding/Building Friendships***

Echoing findings from Anderson et al. (2011), gender schemas were also evident in how students described bonding and building friendships through hazing. In defining college-student hazing, numerous male students touched upon the concept of friendship, indicating that the entire fraternity experience, including the hazing, was worthwhile due to the lifelong nature of friendships formed. For example,

We really try to build brotherhood up and you know and this is our main thing is that these are the guys who are going to be at your wedding and your funeral you know and they are brothers for life.

When interpreted through the lens of

gender schemas, the roughness of the hazing experience is understood as an expected part of masculinity and friendship between men. The social construction of masculinity as tough, self-reliant, and strong may help men to justify abuses of hazing as the following data excerpt suggests:

They might say stuff to deteriorate you and try to lower your self-esteem and make you feel bad about yourself that you cannot get through this process. They get you to lean on the other people you’re going through the process with so that you have to depend on each other, and then you start depending on each other then there’s that uplift in a positive reinforcement so that you can all make it through and work together.

When female participants described friendship, they were more likely to emphasize non-harmful activities:

I just think that being in a fraternity or a sorority can help some people out. I think it gives you a sense of family and belonging, because you have those new friends. Especially if you are shy, you are kind of reserved and all that it can help you out because it gets you with a group of people and it gives you something to do and stuff like that.

In other cases, female participants described group bonding they perceived to occur as a result of the secrecy of hazing. For instance, one participant noted,

I think they believe it’s going to make the group more cohesive and that you have the secret and not a lot of people know that it is not right but when you know it’s not right it’s even more secret almost because you know you should not be doing it but you are anyway and so it’s like a secret that is keeping you together.

While both male and female participants described bonding and friendship when defining hazing throughout the interviews conducted, gender schemas were noted with male

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<sup>1</sup>This expression refers to the practice of using a marker on an individual’s skin to signal evidence of body fat.

participants who were more likely to emphasize group bonding perceived as an outcome of shared *toughness* of enduring the hardships of hazing. Female participants were more likely to describe friendship outside of hazing activities although some referenced friendship bonds perceived as an outcome of sharing the secret of *doing something wrong* through hazing activities.

### ***Compulsion / Opting Out***

The concept of force emerged as another theme in this analysis. Nearly all interviewees indicated that an element of force was implicit in their definitions or experiences of hazing. However, a closer look at how male and female participants described this aspect of force revealed some differences. Most notably, women were more likely to describe opportunities for opting out of hazing. For instance, the following female student described how discomfort could create an opportunity to decline the activity, “but they always say that if you are uncomfortable then you can stop at any time. So, I think there is kind of an opt out of the whole process.”

When hazing involved alcohol, some female participants also described the option to decline. For example, one participant explained, “I know everyone is supposed to [drink] but really if anyone doesn’t want to drink then they don’t have to, and we make that clear that if anyone is uncomfortable, then say no.” Another female participant described how easy it is to speak out when a woman faces hazing and feels discomfort with the activity, whether it is a tradition or not:

I’ve been very lucky that my sorority, and I know others on campus, it [hazing] has never been condoned and it’s never been practiced and I don’t personally think I’ve ever been a part of anything like that and I think any time that they’re doing even more ritualistic type things they’re making sure that no one is doing it against her will and if someone is ever uncomfortable it’s easy to speak up.

A similar sentiment was noted by a female

athlete who said:

I think it depends on the person. I have girls on my team that are so confident they don’t care. They’ll go out and pretty much do anything you tell them to do. But it depends on the person and their comfort level. I mean as soon as someone says no, you don’t push and you don’t cross that line for them.

Conversely, some male participants defined hazing experiences as including the presence of a *false option* to decline involvement in the activity. These male participants reported that a social stigma and unspoken agreement existed where the refusal to participate in the hazing experience resulted in loss of membership opportunities. For instance, one male participant defined a voluntary activity as being compulsory:

Any sort of group or organization either that is done voluntarily or I guess against the person’s will...It’s a very fine line I suppose. Things can be voluntary but it can be quote unquote ‘voluntary.’ It’s voluntary but it’s not.

Another male participant defined hazing as including the unwritten rules involving the hazing of male team members, “No they didn’t have to, but I guess it was hazing, because everybody on the entire team was expected to.”

Moreover, male participants defined college hazing as “volunteering” for compulsory activities if one wanted to gain access into a fraternal organization:

Obviously if you get real and you’re hurting someone physically it is just not right obviously but if you volunteered to do this and they make you carry some bricks in your book bag for a week and make you swim in the freezing Delaware water gap, which are two things that always happen on this campus every year, then you either do it or you don’t, and if you don’t, then you don’t join a fraternity.

Similarly, the following male student shared the following perspective on opting out of hazing:

This happens sometimes, I hear people say, ‘Well it’s optional. Everyone was told that they didn’t have to do this.’ But say it involves something like standing out in the cold that you as a reasonable person would say, and everyone is given the option, but it turns out that everyone does it.

## Discussion

This analysis revealed that college student definitions of hazing can reflect common gender schemas (e.g., behaviors associated with socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity). Both men and women described emotional and psychological implications of hazing practices. For male students, hazing practices were more likely to be associated with humiliation and articulated as a loss of power and status. For female students, it was more common (than among male counterparts) for bodies to be the focus of scrutiny and for female bodies to be objectified in hazing resulting in emotional harm or the threat of emotional harm.

Additionally, this analysis revealed that male students were more likely to express the building of lifelong friendships through hazing experiences that included expectations for enduring abuse and proving one’s mental and physical toughness. In contrast, female students were more likely to describe friendship outside of hazing or as an outcome of the sharing the secret of hazing. This finding aligns with predominant perceptions of ways in which gender norms are performed and understood in the dominant culture in which students are immersed (Allan & Kinney, 2017).

Lastly, we also found that perceived social obligations to conform to gender norms may have a perpetuating effect within hazing activities. For instance, it seemed female students possessed a contradictory awareness of force within hazing, namely that force was implicit within hazing but that opting out would not necessarily result in negative social consequences. Alternatively, male students expressed more rigid and compulsory

expectations to perform masculinity by participating in hazing that required physical endurance or abuse. Through the lens of gender, opting out of hazing experiences is likely to be considered feminine, passive, and weak. This coincides with Anderson et al. (2011) who found that hazing activities reinforced masculinity and heterosexuality for male participants. Thus, the ways in which students make sense of hazing, including the understandings and experience of emotional and physical harm, bonding and friendship, and the power dynamics of compulsion versus opting out of hazing, appear to be shaped by predominant gender schemas.

More research is needed to better understand how students make meaning of hazing activities since these behaviors are widespread in colleges and universities and it is clear they are dangerous and potentially illegal. Although this study contributes to the literature, the data are qualitative and derive from interviews conducted with students at a subset of colleges and universities in the U.S., and are therefore not generalizable to all students. However, the findings are likely transferable to other settings and can also serve as a platform for further research that will continue to expand knowledge about how college students make sense of hazing. More research is needed to better understand how other identity categories (e.g., race, sexual orientation, religious affiliation) as well as particular contexts (e.g., high prestige versus lower prestige groups and social media) influence the way hazing behaviors are perceived and how hazing is defined by students.

These findings hold implications for both practice and future research. For practice, campus professionals involved in hazing prevention work can strengthen their efforts with attention to the subtle yet powerful influence of gender schemas. For example, in designing prevention efforts it is important to consider gendered aspects of hazing and how gender norms may serve as a powerful motivator in students’ desire to participate in particular kinds of hazing, and also to explain how

hazing can be understood differently by male and female students. Understanding these differences may help students be more prepared to name hazing when it occurs rather than accepting it as part of the college experience (Allan & Kinney, 2017). Developing opportunities for students to explore gender norms, specifically how social expectations of masculinity and femininity can impact decision-making, can provide students with another tool for making sense of hazing and information regarding some of the taken-for-granted assumptions that may lead to the normalization or minimization of hazing. Further, discussing topics such as gender schemas in safe and open environments is crucial to disrupting stereotypes and promoting communities that foster social justice. Considering this, we recommend the following for hazing prevention trainings: (a) incorporate learning objectives aimed to help students understand and identify gender schemas (see Valian 2005, 2016; Kimmel, 2004); (b) incorporate content that helps students consider how gender schemas can influence and possibly normalize different types of abuse in hazing; (c) and, drawing on Jones, Abes, and McEwen's (2007) model of multiple dimensions of identity and the work of Cromwell (2015), incorporate content to help students explore how hazing is shaped by other aspects of identity and context. To do this, we recommend drawing on established approaches in the field of Gender Studies by partnering with faculty who teach in this area, and students studying in related disciplines, to assist with developing a hazing prevention training that takes into account an analysis of gender as well as other identity-based differences. Building on suggestions provided by Allan and Kinney (2017), campus professionals can work alongside students to ensure that non-hazing alternatives provide opportunities to disrupt harmful gender norms (e.g., expanding images of ideal beauty and positive body image as well as strengthening emotional competency for students whose socialization minimized its importance). We also

urge campus professionals to evaluate trainings and other prevention initiatives to determine effectiveness and whether responses differ on the basis of gender.

Similarly, integrating understandings of gender and gender schemas in leadership education and leader development programs can help students broaden their understanding of how gender norms shape social interactions. We contend that this scaffolding can help students be better prepared to identify the gendered aspects of hazing when they occur, and can help them to disrupt environments where rigid gender norms may provide fertile ground for certain types of hazing. Further, integrating a gender lens can strengthen bystander intervention programs. For example, students who acquire a sharpened understanding of gender schemas may be more likely to recognize a greater range of hazing behavior that includes both emotional and physical harm and will thus be better prepared to intervene or report hazing incidents.

For research, we recommend further analyses that incorporate gender theory to understand hazing and strengthen its prevention. Similarly, as a social and cultural practice, hazing can also reflect other aspects of identity and social status. Some researchers have explored hazing in BGLOs, revealing some distinctions in types of hazing in comparison to predominantly White groups (e.g., Jones, 2004; Lee-Olukoya, 2010; Parks, Jones, & Hughey, 2014). Building on this foundation, researchers can do more to explore if students from a range of identity groups understand hazing differently and how the lens of intersectionality might be helpful in developing training programs that avoid a *one size fits all* approach. We recommend that researchers partner with campus professionals to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of employing gender theory and an intersectional approach to educating about hazing.

Unfortunately, hazing continues to place college students at risk of harm in colleges and universities. Research-based findings

and recommendations like these are vital to consider as part of a comprehensive approach to prevention that includes assessment, culturally competent capacity building, planning, and the implementation and evaluation of strategies to reduce these dangerous and sometimes lethal behaviors.

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## DEVisING AND TESTING A MEASURE OF FRATERNAL SISTERHOOD

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*This article expands the work of Cohen, McCreary, and Schutts (2017) by devising, testing and validating a scale that measures five distinct schema of sisterhood. The scale development process resulted in a 24-item measure made up of five correlated dimensions: shared social experiences, belonging, support and encouragement, accountability, and common purpose. The five-factor model was stable across multiple samples. The construct validity of the sisterhood scale, including convergent and discriminant validity was also demonstrated.*

The concept of sisterhood can be thought of as the foundation of the sorority experience. As noted by Turk (2004), the early sorority founders emphasized several elements within their sisterhood: support and a sense of solidarity, a feeling of belonging, mechanisms of accountability, and the collective pursuit of self-improvement. The second generation of sorority members, no longer feeling the need to justify their existence on American college campuses, transitioned their focus away from some of the earlier manifestations of sisterhood and focused largely on matters of a social nature. Although Turk (2004) examined sisterhood through the historic lens, little scholarly attention has been paid to the current manifestations of sisterhood within the collegiate sorority. Research by Cohen, McCreary, and Schutts (2017) examined the various schema by which modern collegiate sorority members defined and conceptualized sisterhood, building upon the work of Turk (2004) and adding to the understanding of the foundational concepts of the collegiate sorority experience.

Cohen et al. (2017) theorized five unique schemas by which sorority members defined and conceptualized sisterhood: sisterhood based on shared social experiences, sisterhood based on support and encouragement, sisterhood based on belonging, sisterhood based on accountability, and sisterhood based on common purpose. Sisterhood based on shared social experiences

involves a conceptualization of the sorority as a place by which one gains social standing on campus and in which one gains memorable social experiences. Sisterhood based on support and encouragement emphasizes the sorority as a place in which one receives emotional support and solidarity. Sisterhood based on belonging emphasizes the sorority as a place in which one feels accepted and appreciated by others. Sisterhood based on accountability emphasizes the sorority as a place in which one becomes a better person by being held to high standards of conduct and behavior. Finally, sisterhood based on common purposes visualizes the sorority experience as a place in which women strive together to achieve common goals and self-betterment. The present research extends the work of Cohen et al. (2017) by the use of sequential exploratory strategy (Creswell, 2013), in which previous qualitative findings were used to generate questionnaire items, and an instrument designed to measure the five hypothesized schema of sisterhood was developed, tested, and validated.

### Review of Literature

Though the construct of sisterhood is one that has been largely ignored in the literature on sorority membership, concepts related to the five schemas of sisterhood theorized by Cohen et al. (2017) have received scholarly attention

in both research on sororities as well as in the broader social science literature. This review of the literature examines concepts related to each of the five hypothesized schema of sisterhood, which are the subject of the quantitative examination in this study.

Cohen et al. (2017) first hypothesized a sisterhood based on shared social experiences in which sisterhood is viewed primarily through a social lens; the sorority is viewed as a primarily social outlet and sisterhood is viewed as the relationships that emerge as a result of the social experience that takes place. The sorority experience began to supplement its original objective of academic support with social endeavors as women's presence on campus became more accepted (Turk, 2004). The evolution of these social experiences is seen in today's value on the shared social experience of the sorority. This social aspect of the sorority can be a mechanism for gaining perceived or actual social status as a group within the fraternity/sorority community (Stuber, Klugman, & Daniel, 2011). The social environment in sororities is often connected to partying and consumption of alcohol. For example, Smith and Berger (2010) found that women design social experiences centered on pre-gaming, going out as a group, and then sharing stories together in the morning. As Park, Sher, Wood and Krull (2009) have observed, students in fraternities and sororities tend to self-select into groups based on their previous (i.e., high school) experiences, which would suggest that students demonstrating higher pre-college alcohol use may be predisposed to join a sorority for social reasons and may be predisposed towards a more socially-minded sisterhood compared to sorority members with less pre-college alcohol use.

The cultivation of these social bonds can lead to a group atmosphere in which women feel they belong or have found a home within their sorority. Cohen et al. (2017) suggested a schema of sisterhood based on belonging in which the sorority is envisioned as place where one feels

connected, valued, and appreciated. Belonging as a schema of sisterhood can be better understood through the work of Baumeister and Leary (1995), who explained that belonging goes beyond just a need to feel attached to others, it is a fundamental human desire for something deeper. Strayhorn (2012) found that peer interactions were among the most significant predictors of a sense of belonging on campus, suggesting that connections within clubs and organizations are among the most important features of co-curricular involvement. The feelings of belonging can lead to a sense of obligation to give back to the group, which can be seen through the schema of support and encouragement. Handler (1995) found that women in sororities have greater expectations of their sisters than they do of their friends. Strongly tied to this sisterhood based on belonging is a sisterhood based on encouragement and support (Cohen et al., 2017). The support and encouragement women receive from their sisters coupled with an existing sense of belonging can create an increased level of organizational commitment. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1989) were able to show that if individuals perceive they are supported by organizational structure, they will strive to reciprocate support through high levels of commitment to their organization or workplace. The notion of feeling supported on campus leading to the creation of a sense of belonging among college students is explored in-depth by Strayhorn (2012), who found that students who felt supported by their colleges felt a stronger sense of belonging and were more likely to persist. Though discussed as separate and unique themes by students in the Cohen et al. (2017) study, belonging and support and encouragement are closely aligned with and tied to one another.

Next, Cohen et al. (2017) suggested a schema of sisterhood based on accountability. Organizational commitment and strong relationships allows for varying levels of accountability to organizational values, as

demonstrated by Frink and Klimoski's (1998) findings that individuals will hold themselves accountable to shared standards in an effort to maintain personal relationships within their groups. The different levels of the accountability within an organization can be better understood by looking at the levels of relationships that exist: individual to individual, individual to organization, and individual to the policies, among others. Relationships may vary from person to person at each level and all create a type of web (as described by Gelfand, Lim, & Raver, 2004) with different and complex levels of strength and relevance. As noted by Matney et al. (2016), members who discussed fraternal values within the context of accountability limited that discussion to a group-specific context, but did not necessarily connect those values to a civic context outside of the organization, suggesting that accountability is internalized by many fraternity/sorority members as having to deal only with inter-group relationships with limited applicability related to behaviors that take place outside the group context.

Finally, Cohen et al. (2017) discussed a sisterhood based on common purpose wherein sisterhood is viewed as the mutual striving towards common goals and self-betterment. Sisterhood based on common purpose can be understood through the research of Simpson and Willer (2015), who noted that some individuals in groups emerged as more altruistic, striving for the good of the group. Cohen et al. (2017), in describing the transcendent nature of sisterhood, discussed a belief among sorority members that not all members display notions of altruism and self-sacrifice, noting a *selfish vs. selfless* dichotomy that sorority members believed were present within their organizations. Women have been shown to consistently rate higher on prosocial behavior in groups (see LeBlanc, 2014), which could demonstrate why this schema was not observed by McCreary and Schutts (2015) in their study of brotherhood within the college fraternity, which served as one of the most

notable gender differences observed between the conceptualizations of brotherhood and sisterhood.

## Methods

The objectives of this study were to develop and test a general measure for the construct of sisterhood. We proposed that sisterhood consists of five dimensions: (a) social experiences, (b) belonging, (c) support and encouragement, (d) accountability, and (e) common purpose. In developing the scale, we followed the process outlined by Hinkin (1998) and McCreary and Schutts (2015). The first phase of our study (Study 1) involved the development of scale items and assessment of the internal consistency reliability. In addition, exploratory factor analyses were conducted to determine whether the scale measured five distinct dimensions of sisterhood. The second phase of the study (Study 2) aimed to provide additional evidence for the stability of the factor structure of the sisterhood scale by examining a series of competing models. Finally, in Study 3, the construct validity of the current scale was demonstrated, including evidence for convergent validity and discriminant validity.

### *Study 1: Scale Development*

The purpose of the first study was to develop a scale that contained variable items for each of the five dimensions of sisterhood. Given this objective, an original pool of 39 items was generated from the exploratory interviews, focus groups, and a review of items and concepts described by Cohen et al. (2017) related to their hypothesized five schema of sisterhood. Following the item generation step, the pool of items was evaluated for ambiguity and essentially identical meaning. No items were eliminated for those reasons.

Four undergraduate sorority women at a single institution in the southeastern United States acted as judges in an evaluation of the content validity of the items. In the analysis, the

four judges were exposed to the definition of each dimension plus a related explanation and an example item, and were asked to allocate the statements to each dimension or to a *not applicable* category. This process is known as Q-sorting (Block, 1961). The Q-sort methodology is valuable in the early stages of scale development because it allows researchers to test item-factor agreement and clustering using smaller samples of raters. This methodology is also useful before any large survey administration because it is cost effective, relatively easy to administer, and does not necessitate a large sample size.

Items that did not receive consistent classification by at least three of the four judges were eliminated. This initial analysis resulted in 35 statements for the five dimensions of sisterhood. Next, following the procedure recommended by Hinkin (1998), four additional judges were given each dimension's definition and asked to rate how well each statement reflected the five different dimensions of sisterhood using the following scale: 1 = clearly representative, 2 = somewhat representative, and 3 = not representative at all. For the five dimensions, only items evaluated as clearly representative by at least three judges were retained. This process eliminated two more items. The researchers developed six new items prior to survey administration. The process of reviewing the literature and Q-sorting statements with a panel of judges provided evidence of face validity and content validity. Additional evidence of construct validity will be demonstrated in later sections of this study.

*Subjects.* The subjects consisted of 1,964 undergraduate sorority women (response rate of 24.4%) who were drawn from a random sample of two national women's sororities membership roster in Fall 2014. Most respondents identified as White (85.6%) and were upper-division students (61.4%). A slight majority (51.4%) did not hold a leadership role in their respective chapter. No information about the study was provided prior to the questionnaire session.

*Measures and procedure.* The instrument

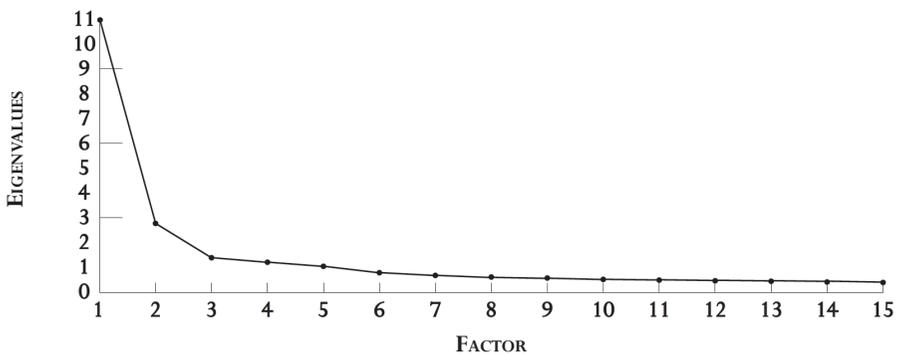
consisted of 39 statements, inclusive of the following five subscales: social experiences (8 items); belonging (9 items); support and encouragement (9 items); accountability (7 items); and common purpose (6 items). Participants were required to respond to each item on a 5-point *strongly agree to strongly disagree* Likert scale. No items were reverse coded. All questionnaires were distributed by the researchers electronically. The researchers received IRB permission for the study, and assured respondents of their confidentiality in the informed consent document. Participants typically spent around 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All data were analyzed using SPSS (version 22).

*Item analysis and reduction.* The researchers computed corrected item-total correlations for each of the five dimensions. These correlations ranged from .34 to .58 for the social experiences dimension; .30 to .85 for the belonging dimension; .50 to .71 for the support and encouragement dimension; .57 to .71 for the accountability dimension; and .63 to .73 for the common purpose dimension. We deleted items with corrected item-total correlations below 0.40, three were eliminated.

*Exploratory factor analysis.* The 45 retained items were factor-analyzed by means of common factor analysis with oblique rotation ( $\kappa = 4$ ). Both Hinkin (1998) and Henson and Roberts (2006) have argued that oblique structures generally fit sample data better. McCreary and Schutts (2015) also demonstrated the dimensions of brotherhood were intercorrelated, which we adopted as further justification for our rotation strategy. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy ( $KMO = .95$ ) and Bartlett tests of sphericity indicated that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. We adopted Ford, MacCallum, and Tait's (1986) guideline in selecting items for the final scale: a minimum factor loading of .40 on the pattern matrix. Items with significant cross-loading or loading values below .40 were eliminated. We removed

items one-at-a-time and reanalyzed the factor structure after each iteration. The resulting scale consisted of items with high loadings on the intended factor and low loadings on the other factors. As expected, the factor solution resulted in five factors according to the Kaiser criterion and scree test of eigenvalues (see Figure 1). These five factors accounted for 65.2% of the total variance and 56.6% of the common variance. By factor, the total variance was partitioned accordingly: belonging (41.7%), accountability (10.3%), support and encouragement (5.2%), common purpose (4.5%), and social experiences (3.9%). We then conducted a parallel analysis, which suggested the stability of the five factors. Hinkin (1998) suggested that scales that explain 60% of the total variance are acceptable. The final 27-item scale of sisterhood, along with the communalities, factor loadings, item-total correlations, and other descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. Table 2 displays the item descriptions and item-factor correlations.

As evidenced in Table 1, Factor 1, comprising eight items, reflected a sense of connection, acceptance, and inclusion (e.g., “My sorority sisters make me feel as if I belong”), and represented the belonging dimension. Factor 2, comprising six items, reflected a sense of obligation to maintain and support the organization’s high standards and shared expectations (e.g., “It bothers me when my sisters fail to uphold our sorority’s high standards”), and represented the accountability dimension. Factor 3, comprising five items, reflected a sense of being there for one another (e.g., “It is important to show up and support my sorority sisters”), and represented the support and encouragement dimension. Factor 4, comprising five items, reflected a sense of shared values and goals (e.g., “The values that we hold draw us together as a sisterhood”), and represented the common purpose dimension. Factor 5, comprising three items, reflected a sense of social experience (e.g., “Because I have my sorority sisters, I always



**Figure 1**  
*Screen plot of eigenvalues.*

have something fun to do”), and represented the social experiences dimension.

The internal consistency of the scale was also tested. The composite sisterhood scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and all but one of the associated subscales were found to possess an acceptable level of internal consistency: belonging ( $\alpha = .94$ ), accountability ( $\alpha = .85$ ), support and encouragement ( $\alpha =$

.81), common purpose ( $\alpha = .87$ ), and social experiences ( $\alpha = .61$ ). All 27 items produced item-total correlations ranging between .25 and .86.

Every factor correlation was highly significant at  $p < .001$ : belonging and accountability ( $r = .40$ ); belonging and support and encouragement ( $r = .63$ ); belonging and common purpose ( $r =$

**Table 1**  
Participant Information

Items	Mean	SD	$h^2$	1	2	3	4	5	Item-total Correlation
1	4.47	.68	.42			.58			.58
2	4.59	.59	.56			.69			.65
3	4.39	.73	.52			.62			.63
4	4.53	.62	.35			.49			.51
5	4.74	.50	.57			.86			.64
6	3.81	.91	.17					.43	.25
7	3.46	1.13	.52	.38				.46	.50
8	4.03	.90	.59	.37				.46	.54
9	4.15	.95	.70	.74					.80
10	4.27	.85	.67	.82					.80
11	3.93	.98	.77	.85					.84
12	4.09	.96	.80	.94					.86
13	4.01	.93	.67	.80					.78
14	3.89	1.03	.68	.89					.80
15	3.82	1.09	.65	.89					.78
16	4.08	.98	.60	.73					.74
17	4.28	.72	.45		.61				.61
18	4.07	.91	.43		.67				.57
19	4.27	.75	.56		.70				.68
20	4.26	.82	.63		.87				.71
21	4.58	.58	.43		.56				.59
22	4.23	.82	.60		.73				.70
23	4.62	.63	.50				.52		.63
24	4.41	.75	.62				.80		.72
25	4.34	.80	.64				.68		.73
26	4.34	.78	.63				.70		.72
27	4.49	.69	.52				.72		.66
Eigenvalue	—	—	—	11.15	2.78	1.40	1.22	1.06	—
Explained variance	—	—	—	41.3%	10.3%	5.2%	4.5%	3.9%	65.2% (TOTAL)
Cronbach's $\alpha$	—	—	—	.94	.85	.81	.87	.61	.94 (FULL SCALE)

Note.  $n = 1964$ .  $b < .40$  omitted. Corrected item-total correlation with the respective factor.

**Table 2**  
*Item-Factor Correlations*

	<u>Items</u>	<u>Factor</u>				
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
1	I would stop what I am doing to help a sorority sister in need.	.46		.64	.49	
2	It is important to show up and support my sorority sisters.	.52	.43	.75	.53	
3	I “have my sorority sisters’ back” and always stand up for them.	.55		.71	.5	
4	Sisterhood is best demonstrated when sisters encourage one another.		.4	.58	.42	
5	It is important that sorority sisters are there to support one another.		.39	.75	.47	
6	Sisterhood is best demonstrated when we do fun things together.					.4
7	My sorority sisters and I do almost everything together.	.59		.45		.65
8	Because I have my sorority sisters, I always have something fun to do.	.65		.51	.47	.68
9	Because I have my sisters, I know I am never alone.	.83		.58	.6	.46
10	My sorority sisters accept me for who I am.	.81		.51	.56	
11	I feel very connected to my sorority sisters.	.87		.56	.56	.5
12	My sorority sisters make me feel as if I belong.	.89		.53	.57	.44
13	My sorority sisters include me in the things they are doing.	.81		.5	.5	.49
14	My sorority sisters often make me feel valued for a talent that I bring to the chapter.	.82		.48	.55	
15	I feel very confident that my opinions matter within the sorority.	.79		.46	.53	
16	I feel very confident that my actions matter within the sorority.	.76	.41	.51	.56	
17	Sometimes, having a difficult conversation with a sorority sister is important, especially when I see her making bad decisions.		.66	.44	.43	
18	Sisterhood is best demonstrated when members are held accountable to the sorority’s high standards.		.63			
19	I expect my sisters to confront me if I do something to violate our sorority’s shared expectations.		.74	.46	.46	
20	It bothers me when my sisters fail to uphold our sorority’s high standards.		.79			
21	All members should be instructed on the sorority’s expectations.		.65	.43	.45	
22	It bothers me when I fail to uphold our sorority’s high standards.		.77	.45	.49	
23	Being in a sorority is about being part of something bigger than yourself.	.46	.52	.57	.69	
24	My sisters and I have a sense of pride in our sorority’s legacy.	.54	.43	.53	.79	
25	The values that we hold draw us together as a sisterhood.	.6	.51	.55	.79	
26	Often in our sorority, we find ourselves working together toward a common purpose.	.62	.42	.55	.78	
27	My sisters and I understand that it is important to leave the sorority better than it was when we joined.	.46	.43	.52	.72	

Note.  $r < .40$  omitted. Structure matrix coefficients

.66); belonging and social experiences; ( $r = .51$ ); accountability and support and encouragement ( $r = .55$ ); accountability and common purpose ( $r = .59$ ); accountability and social experiences ( $r = .20$ ); support and encouragement and common purpose ( $r = .68$ ); support and encouragement and social experiences ( $r = .48$ ); and social experiences and common purpose ( $r = .34$ ). No two factors exceeded Kennedy's (2003) multicollinearity benchmark, indicating that although the factors are strongly interrelated, they measured five unique constructs.

### Study 2: Scale Validation

The scale that emerged as a result of Study 1 successfully distinguished five schemas of sisterhood. As the goal of the present research was to create a general scale measuring sisterhood, it was necessary to test the generalizability of the five-factor solution across different validation samples. Hinkin (1998) noted the inappropriateness of using the same sample for both scale development and assessing the psychometric properties of a new measure. To avoid issues with common method variance, researchers used another independent sample of peer data collected around the same time.

*Subjects.* The subjects consisted of 1,361 undergraduate sorority women (response rate of 21%) who were members of the same two national women's sororities from Study 1. These participants were drawn from an independent random sample of the organizations' membership roster. Most respondents identified as White (88.1%) and were upper-division students (54.0%). Slightly less than half of the respondents (49.3%) did not hold a leadership role in their respective chapter. No information about the study was provided prior to the questionnaire session.

*Measures and procedure.* We decided to develop two more items to potentially improve the internal consistency of the social experience dimension. The items developed were "my sisters and I enjoy attending fraternity social

events as a group" and "I often post about by sorority activities on social media." The 29-item sisterhood scale was incorporated into electronic questionnaires that were administered to the subjects. The respondents in Study 2 were entirely independent of those in Study 1. As before, IRB permission was received and respondents' confidentiality was assured via the informed consent document. Participants typically spent around 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

*Results and discussion.* Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) guideline, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses with Mplus (version 7). This approach permitted the comparison between the hypothesized model and several alternatives to determine the best fitting model. Mulaik et al. (1989) cautioned that good models might suffer from misspecification and therefore researchers should consider alternative models. Therefore, four competing models were examined:

1. A single-factor model (all items represented a single dimension of sisterhood);
2. A two-factor model whereby one factor contained *selfishness* (social and belonging dimensions) and the other factor contained *selflessness* (support and encouragement, accountability, and common purpose);
3. A four-factor model whereby one factor represented the social dimension, one factor represented *reciprocal affect* (the combination of belonging/support and encouragement), one factor represented the accountability dimension, and one factor represented the common purpose dimension; and
4. The hypothesized 5-factor model.

The data were participants' raw scores on each item, and were analyzed using robust maximum likelihood estimation. Consistent with traditional approaches, we correlated the latent factors and uncorrelated the item error variances. We then compared each alternative model on several indicators. These fit indicators

and associated benchmarks were:

1. Normed chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ) statistic: less than 5.0 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004)
2. Comparative fit index (CFI): greater than .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)
3. Tucker-Lewis index (TLI): greater than .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)
4. Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR): less than .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)
5. Root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA): less than .07 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)

Considering the five proposed schema of sisterhood might be reflective of a one-dimensional construct, we mirrored the approach of McCreary and Schutts (2015) and compared the best-fitting alternative to a single-factor model. Results indicated that the five-factor

model provided significantly better fit to these data than the single-factor model. In short, the single factor model of sisterhood insufficiently modeled the complexity of the construct in comparison to the five-factor proposed model.

As we increased the number of factors modeled, improvements in the CFI, TLI, SRMR, and RMSEA occurred. Each successive model reduced the  $\chi^2$  value in a statistically significant manner. However, no model outperformed the five-factor hypothesized structure. Therefore, confirmatory factor analysis supports previous findings that the sisterhood scale should comprise five unique factors that are moderately to strongly correlated. Table 3 displays the stepwise model evaluation results.

As shown in Table 3, the five-factor model fit these data well: The normed chi-square ratio

**Table 3**  
*Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analyses*

Statistic	Null Model	One Factor	Two Factors	Four Factors	Five Factors
$\chi^2$	12843.38	4552.11	2769.85	2208.75	1314.80
<i>df</i>	406	377	376	371	367
$\chi^2/df$	31.63	12.07	7.37	5.95	3.58
CFI	.00	.66	.81	.85	.92
TLI	.00	.64	.79	.84	.92
SRMR	.38	.11	.08	.08	.05
RMSEA	.15	.09	.07	.06	.04

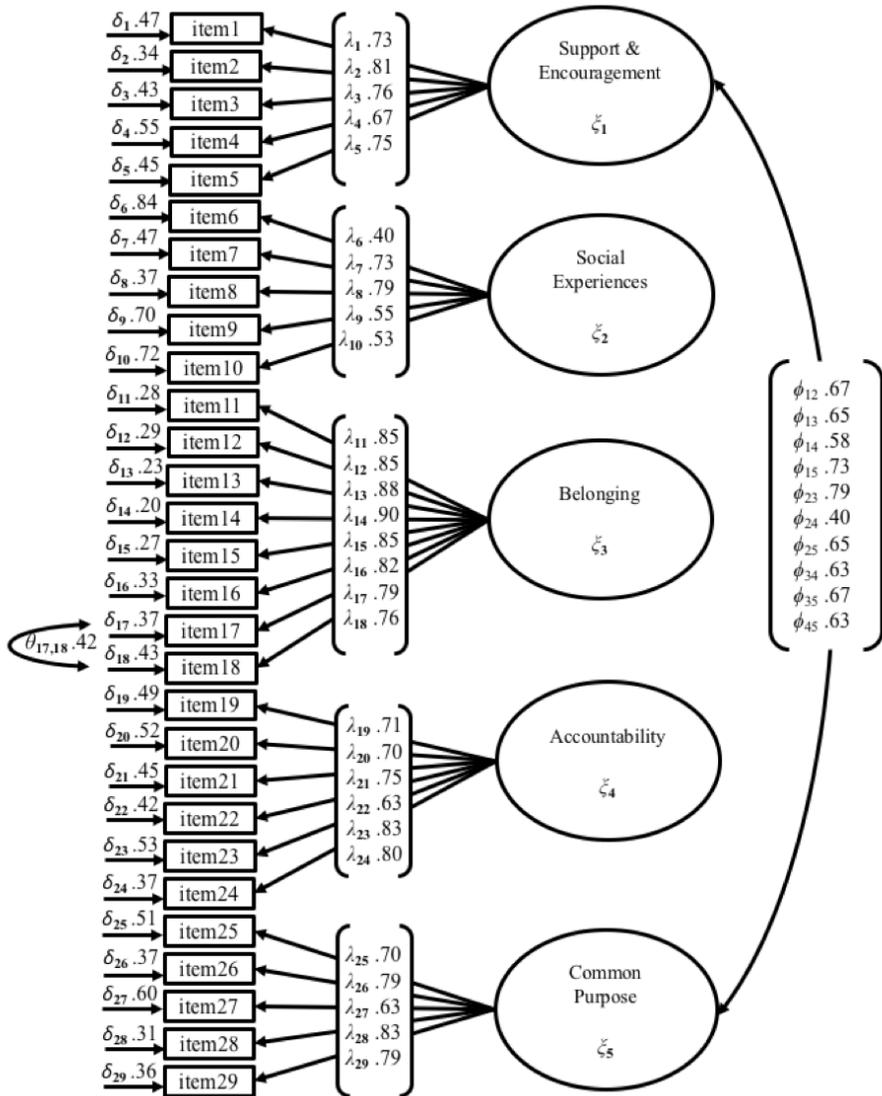
equaled 3.58 below 5.0, SRMR (.05) was less than .08, and the RMSEA (.044, [.041-.046]) was less than .07. The CFI (.92) and TLI (.92) did not reach the benchmark. All items loaded significantly ( $p < .001$ ) onto their proposed factor.

We then sought to further refine the model by examining the potential correlation of item error variances within a factor. The decision to correlate item error variances was done in consideration of the conceptual validity to do so. One pair of items were correlated,  $\theta_{17,18}$  ( $r = .42$ ). Resulting fit indices indicated an improvement in fit over the unmodified version:

$\chi^2(366) = 1198.03, p < .001, \text{ratio} = 3.27; \text{CFI} = .93; \text{TLI} = .93; \text{RMSEA} = .041 [.038 - .043]; \text{SRMR} = .05$ . The full model is presented in Figure 2.

We determined that final estimates of internal consistency reliability were acceptable for each schema: social experiences ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ), belonging ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ), support and encouragement ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ), accountability ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ), and common purpose ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ). Furthermore, the social experience dimension was improved significantly compared to Study 1 ( $\Delta\alpha = .14$ ).

Standardized factor loadings ( $\lambda_s$ ), standardized item error variances ( $\delta_s$ ), and factor correlations



**Figure 2**  
Structural model of sisterhood scale

(φs) are presented for the final model in Figure 2. The variances for each latent factor (ξs) were fixed at 1.0 to obtain factor loadings for all items.

### Study 3: Construct Validity

The ultimate objective of the scale development process is to demonstrate construct validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). This was also

the purpose of the present study. In addition to the face and content validity evidence presented during scale development (Study 1), we also examined two additional types of construct validity: convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is demonstrated if the new scale correlates significantly, but not too highly, with other measures designed to assess

similar constructs. By contrast, discriminant validity is demonstrated if the new scale does not correlate with dissimilar measures. McCreary and Schutts (2015) informed several of the validity correlates chosen in this study.

#### *Measures*

*Sisterhood* (29 items,  $\alpha = .93$ ). The 29 items resulting from previous studies shown to measure five distinct dimensions, namely social experiences, belonging, support and encouragement, accountability, and common purpose. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. By subscale, the  $\alpha$  were: social experiences (0.74), belonging (0.95), support and encouragement (0.85), accountability (0.87), and common purpose (0.86).

*Affective organizational commitment* (6 items, 7-point Likert scale,  $\alpha = .78$ ) is defined as the psychological attachment and emotional connection a person feels to their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Higher scores reflected a stronger degree of commitment.

*Frequency of alcohol use* is defined by the item “on average, how many nights per week do you consume five or more alcoholic drinks?” Higher scores reflected more self-reported alcohol use. The items were measured on an 8-point scale from 0-7 days per week.

*Importance of maintaining social status* (4 items, 5-point Likert scale,  $\alpha = .63$ ) is defined as the degree of importance one places on maintaining the social status afforded them by virtue of membership in their organization. Higher scores reflect a greater desire to maintain such status. The items were: “the social status of my sorority on campus was an important factor in my decision to join,” “meeting cool people and going to great parties were important factors in my decision to join my sorority,” “my sorority works hard to maintain or improve its social prestige on campus—it is important that we have the best girls, and mix with the top fraternities,” and “my chapter often considers how our

actions will be perceived by other sororities and fraternities on campus when we make decisions.”

*Moral disengagement* (24 items, a 5-point Likert scale,  $\alpha = .91$ ) is defined as the degree to which an individual can rationalize their unjust or unethical actions. Higher scores reflected a greater ability to rationalize such actions (Bandura, 1996).

*Perceived organizational support* (8 items, 7-point Likert scale,  $\alpha = .70$ ) is defined as the degree to which the individual feels the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Higher scores reflected greater support beliefs.

*Person-organization fit* (3 items, 7-point Likert scale,  $\alpha = .91$ ) is defined as the congruence between an individual’s beliefs and values and the culture, values, and norms of the organization (Cable & Judge, 1997).

*Subjects and procedure.* The subjects of this study were the same individuals from Study 2. In addition to completing questions about sisterhood, respondents also answered additional items included for the purpose of establishing construct validity. Participants typically spent around 10 minutes completing these additional items.

## Hypotheses

As recommended by Hinkin (1998), the convergent and discriminant validity of the sisterhood scale was sought by examining the correlations with theoretically similar and different constructs. Table 4 presents the hypothesized convergence relationships. Evidence for discriminant validity will be demonstrated by: (a) the factor correlations from Study 1 and Study 2 not exceeding 0.80 (Kennedy, 2003); (b) the AVE values exceeding 0.50; (c) correlations of other subscales or validation measures less than the square root of AVE for a given construct, and (d) the non-

**Table 4***Validity Hypotheses*


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1a	Alcohol use will be positively related to the social experience dimension of sisterhood
1b	Alcohol use will be negatively related to the accountability dimension of sisterhood
1c	Alcohol use will not be related to the overall sisterhood scale
1d	Alcohol use will not be related to the belonging, support and encouragement, and common purpose dimensions of sisterhood
2	The importance of maintaining social status will be positively related to the social experience dimension of sisterhood
3	Affective organizational commitment will be positively related to the belonging dimension of sisterhood
4	Perceived organizational support will be positively related to the support and encouragement dimension of sisterhood
5	Moral disengagement will be negatively related to the accountability dimension of sisterhood.
6	Person organization fit will be positively related to the common purpose dimension of sisterhood.

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correlation between the overall sisterhood scale and frequency of alcohol use. No studies have shown a relationship between overall sisterhood beliefs and alcohol use. Rather, we contend that only two of the schema should theoretically be related to alcohol use: the social experience dimension and the accountability dimension.

**Convergent Validity**

Convergent validity was established in several manners. First, t-tests from Study 2 indicated that the high item loadings to their respective factors were significant (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). Second, we calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) statistic for each factor (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Lowry and Gaskin (2014) noted that a construct should have an AVE value above 0.5. The AVE statistics for sisterhood (.75) and its subscales were: social experiences (.38), belonging (.70), support and encouragement (.55), accountability (.54), and common purpose (.57). The observed correlations and AVE statistics demonstrated acceptable convergent validity for all but one of the subscales. The AVE of social experiences was lower than 0.5. We checked the factor loadings and concluded that validity is not a concern. The correlations are presented in Table 5. The square root of AVE is presented along the diagonal. Statistics for the

overall sisterhood scale were also computed.

The correlations between alcohol use and (a) the social experience dimension of sisterhood ( $n = 1361, r = .12, p < .001$ ) and (b) the accountability dimension of sisterhood ( $n = 1361, r = -.15, p < .001$ ) were significant and in the expected direction. The correlation between the importance of maintaining social status and the social experience dimension of sisterhood ( $n = 1361, r = .30, p < .001$ ) was significant and in the expected direction. The correlation between affective organizational commitment and the belonging dimension of sisterhood ( $n = 1361, r = .48, p < .001$ ) was significant and in the expected direction. The correlation between perceived organizational support and the support and encouragement dimension of sisterhood ( $n = 1361, r = .30, p < .001$ ) was significant and in the expected direction. The correlation between moral disengagement and the accountability dimension of sisterhood ( $n = 1361, r = .48, p < .001$ ) was significant and in the expected direction. The correlation between person-organization fit and the common purpose dimension of sisterhood ( $n = 1361, r = .63, p < .001$ ) was significant and in the expected direction. Therefore, we found support for Hypotheses 1a, 1b and Hypotheses 2–6.

### Discriminant Validity

We assessed the discriminant validity of sisterhood and its subscales by examining the correlations between unrelated measures, the factor correlations from Study 1 and Study 2, and the AVE statistic for each subscale. As a measure of discriminant validity, correlations with other constructs and between subscales should be smaller than the square root of the AVE of the construct in question (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). In Study 1 and Study 2, results indicated that no two sisterhood dimensions suffered from multicollinearity, suggesting they

each independently measured some related aspect of the sisterhood construct. Furthermore, no external measure correlation coefficient exceeded the square root AVE calculation for the overall sisterhood scale or its subscales. The only concern was the correlation between belonging and social experiences ( $r = .64, p < .001$ ) and the square root of AVE (.62).

Frequency of alcohol use was also used to examine discriminant validity. Theoretically, alcohol use should not correlate with the overall sisterhood scale. Evidence is presented in Table 5 that demonstrates the convergence

**Table 5**  
*Correlations of the Study 3 Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Sisterhood scale	.75								.58			
2. Social experiences	.78**	.62							.65			
3. Belonging	.88**	.64**	.84						.63			
4. Support and encouragement	.79**	.56**	.60**	.74					.51			
5. Accountability	.65**	.35**	.35**	.50**	.67				.64			
6. Common Purpose	.82**	.54**	.62**	.64**	.57**	.75			.25			
7. Affective organizational commitment	.46**	.36**	.48**	.34**	.18**	.35**	—					
8. Frequency of alcohol use	.00	.12**	.04	-.01	-.15**	-.05	.01	—				
9. Importance of maintaining social status	.12**	.30**	.07*	.02	.03	.07*	.09*	.20**	—			
10. Moral disengagement	-.20**	-.09**	-.11**	-.23**	-.24**	-.21**	-.06*	.19**	.17**	—		
11. Perceived organizational support	.41**	.27**	.48**	.30**	.13**	.31**	.74**	.00	.09**	-.09**	—	
12. Person-organization fit	.65**	.45**	.56**	.50**	.43**	.63**	.37**	-.02	.05	-.20**	.33**	—

Note.  $n = 1361$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . The sisterhood diagonal represents  $\sqrt{AVE}$ .

between accountability and social experiences dimensions of sisterhood and alcohol use. Table 5 also illustrates the non-significant correlation between the overall sisterhood scale and frequency of alcohol use ( $n = 1361, r < .001, ns$ ). Moreover, the support and encouragement ( $n = 1361, r = -.01, ns$ ), belonging ( $n = 1361, r = .04, ns$ ), and common purpose ( $n = 1361, r = -.05, ns$ ) schema of sisterhood were also not related to alcohol use. Our concern that the belonging and social experience dimensions may not be discriminant from one another based on AVE statistic findings is reduced by the finding that alcohol use was significantly correlated with the social dimension, but not the belonging dimension. If the two were essentially analogous, we would have expected significant correlations between alcohol use and both dimensions. These findings supported the discriminant validity of the sisterhood scale.

## Discussion

This study is an extension of the theoretical framework of sisterhood proposed by Cohen et al. (2017). We described the procedures used to develop and validate a scale to measure conceptualizations of sisterhood within the college sorority. The structure of this scale is generally consistent with the theoretical schema of sisterhood offered by Cohen et al. (2017). As a result of scale development, item analysis, and validation efforts, a 29-item sisterhood scale was determined to be reliable and valid across two independent samples of college sorority women. A confirmatory factor analysis found a stable five-factor structure, consisting of the following dimensions: social experience, belonging, support and encouragement, accountability, and common purpose. The construct validity for the sisterhood scale and its associated subscales, including content, face, convergent, and discriminant validity was also demonstrated by scale development and item analysis procedures in addition to correlations with theoretically

related and unrelated measures. Taken together, we find strong evidence for the construct validity of the sisterhood measure.

The conceptual relationship of sisterhood to the brotherhood schemas described by McCreary and Schutts (2015) is also of note. The items used to conceptualize the belonging and accountability schemas in this study was very similar to the McCreary and Schutts items for the same construct. Future studies should explore a unified scale that can be tested for invariance by gender. In the fraternity sample, McCreary and Schutts reported the mean belonging score as 4.38. By contrast, this mean belonging score in this study of sorority members was 4.04. These differences are important because belonging has been shown to correlate with persistence, graduation, and institutional commitment (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009). Understanding why women might feel a diminished sense of belonging within their sorority experience should be of great interest to both scholars and decision makers.

The development of an instrument to measure sisterhood is of great value to scholars and practitioners. With a valid and reliable tool, these individuals are better equipped to study the effect of interventions on the various dimensions of sisterhood. This is best accomplished when a profile of healthy levels of sisterhood is established. It is possible that programming and targeted interventions intended to promote more transcendent forms of sisterhood (e.g., accountability and common purpose) could be developed from this research. It also stands to reason that sorority members may be amenable to such interventions when presented as ways to improve their conceptualization of sisterhood. Developing a more robust understanding of the basic tenants of the sorority experience is critical to improving the experience for members and aligning that experience with desired educational outcomes.

## Limitations

Any research should be viewed within the context of its limitations. The present research contains a number of limitations that must be considered before attempting to generalize these results to all sorority members. First, the organizations that were surveyed in this study are members of the National Panhellenic Conference (the umbrella group governing the 26 historically White national sororities). As a result, caution should be used in generalizing these findings to sorority members from organizations that are historically Black, Hispanic, or multicultural in nature. Future research should seek to replicate this study among members of culturally-based groups. In addition, the present research relied upon web-based surveys that were emailed to participants. In order to generalize the findings, we must assume that participants answered the surveys in a truthful manner. Lastly, the present research is based on the qualitative findings of Cohen et al. (2017), which was conducted by way of focus groups with sorority members attending a national convention. As noted in that study, members of other organizations, because of rituals or espoused organizational values, may conceptualize sisterhood in different ways. Although the present research surveyed members of two national sororities (including the one used in the Cohen et al.'s 2017 study), additional research with members of various organizations should be conducted to ensure that the five-factor model of sisterhood demonstrated in this study is generalizable across various organizations.

## Implications for Future Research

The value of identifying a model of sisterhood in the college sorority lies in such a model's ability to diagnose or predict organizational outcomes. An opportunity exists to further explore gender differences on related schema of brotherhood and sisterhood, as well as case

studies and profiles of chapters with different levels of sisterhood. Further research should also investigate the relationships among sisterhood and its dimensions with other constructs in social science research.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for further research involves using the sisterhood scale longitudinally to capture how sisterhood develops in an organization, chapter, or individual over time. What experiences help and hinder such development? Are there optimal chapter sizes or key factors in the student experience that tend to bring about the highest forms of sisterhood in the majority of members? As Cohen et al. (2017) observed, sorority women spoke of the transcendent and developmental nature of sisterhood, regularly stating that many women come into the organization seeking and experiencing the social aspects of sisterhood, but over time come to understand and experience the more altruistic forms of sisterhood. Longitudinal designs are also well positioned to provide evidence to the causal nature of sisterhood development. Further research is necessary to establish whether a specific order of sisterhood dimensions exists as an individual progresses toward transcendent sisterhood.

Future research should also make use of multi-level modeling in order to better understand how sisterhood and related constructs differ at the individual level within chapters, at the chapter level within a campus community, or at the campus level within a national sample. In addition, future research should examine regional differences, as well as inherent differences related to sorority housing, recruitment timing/style, alumnae interaction, socio-economic and student employment status, and other individual and chapter-level variables.

Additional factors that influence a sorority woman's transcendence toward accountability and common purpose also merit further examination. In particular, sequential explanatory strategy (Creswell, 2013) may be useful to identify and profile sorority chapters

that measure exceptionally high on various schema of sisterhood. An exhaustive qualitative inquiry could be conducted on those exemplars to determine what cultural fixtures contribute to the high levels of sisterhood in those chapters. Being able to identify organizational and individual factors that both contribute to and inhibit transcendent sisterhood should be of great interest to scholars and practitioners. Based on the work of Cohen et al. (2017) we surmise that factors such as chapter size, leadership level within the organization, living in a chapter facility, and the culture of a sorority chapter's internal self-governance/standards process (among other things) may impact the highest forms of sisterhood. Further research is necessary to be certain of this conjecture.

In conclusion, this research supports the assertion that sisterhood is a multidimensional construct. The results of these studies provide robust psychometric support for a 29-item measure of sisterhood across five distinct schemas. Use of the sisterhood instrument may enrich theory of organizational behavior and sisterhood through an exploration of the different dimensions of sisterhood from a cross-sectional and longitudinal perspective.

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**INTERSECTIONAL VALUE?  
A PILOT STUDY EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR  
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN HISTORICALLY BLACK SORORITIES  
VERSUS NON-HISTORICALLY BLACK SORORITIES**

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*The purpose of this pilot study was to initially explore if there is value added in terms of educational outcomes for Black women involved in historically Black sororities by comparing them to Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities, given the racial-gender support historically Black sororities offer. Main findings suggest Black women involved in historically Black sororities were more socially involved than Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities. The article closes with implications for practice and future research.*

The positive relationship between student engagement and fraternity and sorority involvement among African American college students is well documented (e.g., see Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). This is especially true for African American<sup>1</sup> college students who join Black Greek-lettered Organizations (BGLOs), or historically Black college fraternities and sororities, regardless of their attendance across institutional type (see Kimbrough, 1995; Ross, 2001 for an overview of these organizations). Given that researchers have concluded that student organizations, those designed for racially minoritized<sup>2</sup> students, assist students in ways that include racial identity development (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010) and leadership development (Dugan, Kodama, & Gebhardt, 2012), the engagement outcomes associated with BGLOs involvement are not surprising.

Research on BGLOs and African American college student involvement continues to develop. However, despite that African American women represent approximately 60% of the total enrollment of African American students in institutions of higher education (Allen,

Jayakumar, Griffin, Korn, & Hurtado, 2005), studies explicitly focusing on gender have disproportionately focused on men (e.g., Jones, 2004; McClure, 2006). The limited attention African American women have received in BGLOs involvement and, more broadly, in studies exploring gender among African American students, might be explained by Kaba's (2008) thesis that African American women are the new *model minority*. Kaba defined model minority as "groups that were one time marginalized, educationally, economically and socially, but eventually rose up despite their many obstacles to become prosperous, admired and even emulated" (p. 310). We boldly refute Kaba's claim.

Generally, the model minority narrative ignores diversity amongst racially minoritized populations. Further, building upon Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) articulation of *intersectionality*—highlighting the ways multiple marginalized identities oppress Black women because of interlocking and systemic forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism)—assigning the model minority label to African American women is dangerous. The model minority

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<sup>1</sup>African American and Black are used interchangeably throughout the article.

<sup>2</sup>Similar to other scholars (e.g., Harper, 2012; Harper & Griffin, 2011), we use the term minoritized acknowledging that racial categories are social constructions in the United States and certain groups are minoritized in the context of racial power and privilege afforded to White people.

misnomer is particularly troubling as African American women are “theoretically erased” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139) when interventions and supports focus on single-axis identities (e.g., solely race, solely gender) rather than the intersection of their multiple marginalized identities. Acknowledging and recognizing the unique experiences of African American college women is important, and they need educational support, as much as any student, as they matriculate through college. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore historically Black sororities as one form of support for African American women in college.

With a long history of developing cultures that resist oppression, refuting stereotypical societal expectations, and celebrating and maintaining aspects of their own culture (Phillips, 2005), historically Black sororities have supported members in a number of ways. Phillips (2005) noted, “by creating communities and intentionally developing sisterhood, African American sorority women have been able to affirm and encourage one another while overcoming personal difficulties” (p. 350). Still, despite the in-depth support these organizations provide for members, limited research has focused on the racial-gender structures of these groups.

Black women involved in historically Black sororities highlight the support, or intersectional support, African American women receive from involvement in these organizations. Historically Black sororities provide mentorship, relationships, and other supports that other groups cannot provide African American women, what Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) called intersectional social capital. Using an *intersectional social capital* theoretical framework, this article explores if there is evidence that there is truly an added value for Black women involved in historically Black sororities by comparing them to Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities.

### *African American Women in College*

Although Black women are making significant strides in the realm of academia, the cost of this success, socially and emotionally, is rarely recognized in research (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Patton, Haynes, & Croom, 2017). Chavous and Cogburn (2007) noted that African American women in college are primarily used as a success measure as they are compared to African American men at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. With focus on the successes of Black women within education, a false perception is created about the experiences of Black women in college. This invisibility in academia is detrimental for Black women on college campuses—specifically predominantly White campuses—since African American women often graduate at lower rates than their White, Latina, and Asian American women collegiate peers (Bartman, 2015). Scholars have increasingly begun exploring and documenting African American women’s unique collegiate experiences to combat this invisibility.

Schwartz, Bower, Rice, and Washington (2003) found that a low sense of belonging was a common experience for the Black women in their study as the women were often excluded from organizations that were populated by mostly White students. Further, building upon Collins’ articulation of *outsider within* status (as cited in Howard-Hamilton, 2003), Howard-Hamilton noted that Black women in college were often invited into places that dominant groups had occupied, but were invisible and had no voice to contribute to the space. These issues created a need for Black women to develop coping strategies while in college in order to persist to graduation. As noted by Robinson-Wood (2009), “coping varies depending on a person’s belief systems and resources” (p. 78); however, researchers have documented that Black women in college use similar tactics to cope with everyday stressors. These coping

strategies include family support, spirituality, mentorship, and peer support.

Some Black women persist through challenges of invisibility and isolation and remain enrolled at higher education to attain degrees because of familial expectations and support (Porter & Dean, 2015). For example, Kennedy (2014) found Black female<sup>3</sup> college students noted family playing a significant role in their decision to enroll into college, and family as important to their overall college experience. In addition, aside from encouragement in attending college, Alexander and Bodenhorn (2015) found that Black female college students viewed family as a support system for their personal and emotional adjustments during their college careers. Still, familial relationships are not consistently positive. For example, Gilford and Reynolds (2011) found that family relationships could have negative effects on Black female college students when these students are the main providers of their families while transitioning into a new collegiate environment. Black women also turn inward to cope, leaning on their spirituality, as highlighted in Patton and McClure's (2009) study. Black women also turn to on-campus support to cope, and this support is often in the form of mentorship and peer support.

As noted by Borum and Walker (2012), there is a positive relationship between Black students' satisfaction with their institutions and faculty mentorship. For African American women specifically, mentoring is beneficial in their development and advancement, particularly when African American women are serving as mentors and displaying role-modeling behaviors for other African American women in college (Crawford & Smith, 2005). Despite these documented positive gains, the lack of racial-gender mentorship opportunities available for Black women on college campuses is noteworthy as African American women who are faculty and staff account for a small percentage of the population of professionals on college campuses

(Bartman, 2015; Croom & Patton, 2012). Given the lack of access to campus support in the form of African American women in faculty and staff roles, Black women in college may resort to other on-campus networks such as peer support. Black students rely on support from others and the chance to bond with fellow students to cope with stress, particularly at predominantly White institutions; and Black women in college often find similar support from other Black women in college (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013; Payne & Suddler, 2014). African American women's involvement in BGLOs or historically Black sororities is one form of peer support that warrants further attention given their racial-gender structures.

### *African American Women Involved in Greek-Lettered Organizations*

Generally, the educational and engagement outcomes associated with African Americans involved in Greek-lettered organizations are positive. Patton et al. (2011) found that African Americans involved in fraternities and sororities reported higher levels of faculty-student interactions and involvement in active or collaborative assignments at significant levels. When examining BGLOs in particular, scholars have found similar educational benefits. Kimbrough (1995) and Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) both found that African American students involved in historically Black fraternities and sororities held more student leadership roles and believed their leadership skills were developed as a result of their fraternity or sorority involvement. In regards to academic outcomes, Harper (2007), Mitchell (2012), and Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) all found positive outcomes associated with BGLOs. Harper (2007) found that BGLO members were more engaged in classroom discussions because of their affiliation, Mitchell (2012) found that BGLO membership contributed positively to persistence towards a degree, and Sutton and Kimbrough (2001)

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<sup>3</sup>Female and women are used interchangeably given an author's use of the term in their work.

found BGLO members held higher grade point averages (GPAs) when compared to African American students not involved in BGLOs. When focusing specifically on African American women involved in historically Black sororities, the racial-gender support these organizations provide is pronounced (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Mitchell, 2014).

Mitchell (2014) explored the importance of gender for BGLO members and found that African American men involved in historically Black fraternities overlooked gender while the African American women involved in historically Black sororities found value in the gendered structure of the organizations, highlighting how historically Black sororities were created just for them. In Floyd's 2009 study, she highlighted similar findings as the African American women in her study called historically Black sororities "a place of [their] own" (p. 120) where they connected with like-minded women. Later, Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) explored the ways in which the racial-gender structures, or intersectional nature, of historically Black sororities provided African American women with unique support. They found that historically Black sororities provided the women what they coined *intersectional social capital* given that the organizations provided "access to a space where others have a shared common experience" and "an actual space where the participants felt secure sharing their opinions and being themselves because they shared the common experience of navigating a predominately White institution as Black women" (p. 291).

### Research Questions

The purpose of this pilot study was to quantitatively explore if there is value added in terms of positive academic and social educational outcomes for Black women involved in historically Black sororities by comparing them to Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities, given the intersectional support

Black sororities offer African American women as documented by Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014). Two main research questions guided this study:

1. Are there differences between involvement in historically Black sororities versus non-historically Black sororities and academic outcomes (i.e., GPA, hours per week studying alone, hours per week studying with friends, number of faculty interactions, retention/persistence) for African American women?
2. Are there differences in the amount of time spent participating in various educational practices (i.e., student organization involvement) and type of sorority affiliation for African American women?

### Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by Greyerbiehl and Mitchell's (2014) articulation of *intersectional social capital*. The framework builds upon (a) Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) articulation of intersectionality and (b) social capital theory. As alluded to earlier, intersectionality highlights the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (e.g., race, gender, class) and the ways in which systems of oppression intersect and reinforce each other (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) to further marginalize those who have multiple marginalized identities (e.g., low-income Black women) (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Given that historically Black sororities were founded to serve Black women, in particular, one can assume they provide African American women a place where members have similar lived experiences. Social capital theory highlights the resources embedded within social networks and can be defined as an "investment in social relations with expected return" (Lin, 1999, p. 30). As African American women decide to join historically Black sororities, one can assume they expect some sort of return. Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) wrote, "historically Black sororities

can be considered ‘intersectional support groups’ because they provide African American women a unique space on predominantly White campuses—space where the overlapping of race and gender are acknowledged” (p. 284), and outcomes associated with this intersectional social capital is explored in this study.

## Method

### *Instrument*

This study utilized a survey instrument designed by the researchers to investigate characteristics of undergraduate African American college students (see Appendix A for a sample of the questions utilized for this study). To develop the instrument, an extensive review of literature relating to the experiences of African American college students and related survey instruments (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement, Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys) was conducted. Content validity of the survey was established through an extensive literature review and through consulting senior-level student affairs administrators and faculty members on relatedness of questions to experiences available within higher education. After consultation and revision, the instrument was piloted with a sample of 16 students to determine the test-retest reliability of the questions. The researchers found that all but one question scored greater than .60 (ranging from .76 to .985), which is generally acceptable when using categorical data in the social sciences (Landis & Koch, 1977); the remaining item received a score of .562.

### *Sample*

A purposive sample of undergraduate students who self-identified within each participating institution’s record system as African American were invited to participate in the larger study, leading to 728 total participants. Seven four-year public institutions across the United States participated in the larger study; as defined by the

Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, four master’s colleges and universities as well as three doctoral-granting universities agreed to participate. An invitation to participate was sent to students by various institutions, and a reminder was sent one week later. The invitation informed students of the anonymous nature of the survey, how to contact the researchers, that GPAs were not disclosed to the researchers, and that participation was voluntary and could be ceased at any time.

The sample for the present study consists of 75 undergraduate African American students who identified as women and indicated involvement within a sorority across five of the seven institutions included in the study; two regional campuses did not offer sorority life so results from five institutions were applicable to the current study. Of the sample, 13 (17.3%) students identified as first-year, nine (12.0%) sophomore status, 21 (28.0%) as juniors, and 30 (40.0%) as seniors. In addition, 32 (42.7%) students were between the ages of 18 and 20, 26 (34.7%) were between the ages of 21 and 23, 9 (12.0%) were between the ages of 24 and 26, 2 (2.7%) were between the ages of 27 and 29, and 6 (8.0%) were age 30 or above.

### *Data Analysis*

Due to the categorical nature of the data and a small sample size, Mann-Whitney U tests were utilized to determine if the population distributions were equal for students involved in a historically Black sorority and peers involved in a non-historically Black sorority. A Mann-Whitney U test is the nonparametric alternative to an independent samples t-test (Moore, McCabe, & Craig, 2012). This method of data analysis is best for Likert-type scales since the data typically will not follow a normal distribution and this method is also beneficial for small sample sizes since the central limit theorem will not apply. Thus, failing to use a nonparametric test may produce biased parameter estimates and statistical conclusions may not be valid. SPSS Statistics 23 (IBM

Corporation, 2015) was utilized to analyze the data and the alpha level was set at .05.

## Results

### Academic Involvement

The data suggest there was no statistical difference ( $z = -.66, p = .51$ ) among the academic performance of students in this study, as 44.4% of women in historically Black sororities possessed a GPA greater than 3.00 compared to 48.0% of students in non-historically Black sororities. Furthermore, though 35.2% of women in non-historically Black sororities and 47.6% of

individuals in a historically Black organization identified a faculty or staff mentor, the difference was not significantly different ( $z = -.99, p = .324$ ). Lastly, results also indicated no statistical difference in the number of hours studying alone ( $z = -.36, p = .72$ ) or with friends ( $z = -.42, p = .67$ ) per week for women in historically Black sororities and non-historically Black sororities.

### Social Involvement

A Mann-Whitney test indicated that there was a significant difference ( $z = -2.46, p = .01$ ) in the involvement rates of African American women in cultural student organizations. Table 1 indicates

**Table 1**  
*Involvement in Cultural Student Organizations*

Hours/Week	Non-historically Black Sororities	Historically Black Sororities
0	24 (48.0%)	6 (30.0%)
1 to 5	23 (46.0%)	6 (30.0%)
6 to 10	2 (4.0%)	5 (25.0%)
11 to 15	1 (2.0%)	2 (10.0%)
16 to 20	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.0%)
20+	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. 70 students answered this question.

that African American women who were members of a historically Black sorority spent more time per week involved within cultural organizations as compared to African American women involved within a non-historically Black sorority.

Furthermore, there was a statistical difference

( $z = -3.65, p < .001$ ) in the number of hours involved per week in sororities. Specifically, African American women in historically Black sororities spent more time involved within Greek organizations per week compared to African American women involved in a non-historically Black sorority (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Involvement in Sororities*

Hours/Week	Non-historically Black Sororities	Historically Black Sororities
0	24 (48.0%)	2 (9.5%)
1 to 5	16 (32.0%)	7 (33.3%)
6 to 10	9 (18.0%)	8 (38.1%)
11 to 15	0 (0.0%)	4 (19.0%)
16 to 20	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
20+	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. 71 students answered this question.

Although there was no difference in the rate at which women seriously considered leaving an institution, there was a statistical difference ( $z = -2.33, p = .04$ ) in the reasons women remained enrolled after seriously considering leaving. After examining further, African American women in historically Black sororities were more likely to decide to return as a result of family support compared to African American women in a non-

historically Black sorority (see Table 3).

### Limitations

Prior to discussing the findings, we would like to acknowledge some limits of this study. First, given this is a pilot study consisting of 75 African American women across five U.S. institutions, the study is not generalizable to the entire population of African American women

**Table 3**  
*Summary of Mann-Whitney U Analyses*

Variable	Z	p-value
<b>Academic Outcomes</b>		
Hours studying alone	-.364	.716
Hours studying with friends	-.424	.671
Cumulative GPA	-.658	.511
Considered leaving the institution	-1.754	.079
Remained enrolled due to family support*	-2.333	.044
Internships	-1.919	.055
Undergraduate Research	-1.939	.053
Faculty/Staff Mentor	-.986	.324
<b>Social Involvement</b>		
Hours within cultural organizations	-2.455	.014
Hours within non-cultural organizations	-.493	.622
Hours involved within sorority	-3.646	< .001

*Note.* \*exact 2-sided significance

involved in sororities across the United States. In particular, the lack of generalizability was most notable in our sample in regards to the various age differences of the students who participated in our study. Although 77% of the sample consisted of women 18–23, the other 23% of data came from women aged 24 and older. The differences in age could also present differences in experiences and expectations of membership within both historically and non-historically Black sorority life. Second, because the data were collected using categorical variables, Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare distributions of the two samples (i.e., African American women in historically Black sororities versus those in non-

historically Black sororities), and more rigorous statistical analyses may produce more robust findings. Third, historically Black sororities are comparatively smaller in membership in terms of recruitment and chapter size to their non-historically Black counterparts. Therefore, measures such as involvement may be skewed amongst sororities based on the number of active members in a chapter at the time this study was conducted. Fourth, as noted by McClure (2006), fraternities and sororities are voluntary associations and students must be interested in joining, selected for membership, and must be able to afford membership to receive the benefits gained from these organizations. Fifth,

BGLOs are not without controversy and often deal with issues surrounding pledging and hazing (Parks & Brown, 2005). Pledging and hazing were not explored within this study, but this limitation should not be overlooked as pledging and hazing influence students' experiences in BGLOs. Finally, historically, sororities have primarily recruited, and have been exclusively for, cisgender women; therefore, we did not address outcomes associated with transgender African American women attempting to join sororities.

## Discussion

The findings of this pilot study both support and expand upon the literature on African American women involved in sororities by comparing those in historically Black sororities to those involved in non-historically Black sororities, emphasizing the racial-gender or intersectional structure of historically Black sororities, and exploring whether these organizations provide African American women with what Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) called *intersectional social capital*. In Greyerbiehl and Mitchell's (2014) qualitative study, they concluded that Black women involved in historically Black sororities found unique support that was not provided in other organizations, and the results of this pilot study provides quantitative data in support of those findings.

The first research question explored differences between involvement in historically Black sororities versus non-historically Black sororities and academic outcomes (i.e., GPA, hours per week studying alone, hours per week studying with friends, number of faculty interactions, and retention/persistence) for African American women. We found that survey participants involved in historically Black sororities were more likely to remain at an institution due to family support. As indicated in the literature, family support is an important coping mechanism for African American women

in college (e.g., Kennedy, 2014; Porter & Dean, 2015), and we found that those involved in historically Black sororities were less likely to leave an institution because of family support. Though this finding is interesting, it simply highlights more questions about how membership in historically Black sororities and family support were related for the participants.

Although African American women involved in historically Black sororities were more likely to remain at an institution due to family support, and this was the only significant finding related to academic outcomes, three other variables warrant attention: seriously considering leaving, involvement in internships, and involvement in undergraduate research. These variables were marginally significant and women involved in historically Black sororities were less likely to consider leaving and were more involved in internships and undergraduate research. With a larger sample size, we anticipate these findings would have reached significance. In Mitchell's (2012) study, he found similar findings and attributed persistence to support provided by members and professional opportunities to faculty, staff, and alumni members who were affiliated with BGLOs. Finally, we would like to highlight the non-significant GPA finding. Previous research has indicated students involved in BGLOs may suffer academically (e.g., see Chambers & Walpole, 2017; Guiffrida, 2004; Harper, 2000; Mitchell, 2012); however, this was not the case for the students included within this sample and refutes those claims.

In the second research question, we explored the differences in the amount of time spent participating in various educational practices (i.e., student organization involvement) and type of sorority affiliation for African American women. Reaffirming previous studies (Guiffrida, 2004; Mitchell, 2012), African American women involved in historically Black sororities were more involved than those in non-historically Black sororities in two ways: they were more involved in cultural student organizations and

within their sororities. These findings also reaffirm the importance of groups created specifically for racially minoritized students in terms of providing cultural and racial identity support (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Further, the type of support found within historically Black sororities goes deeper than other organizations because members have a sense of belonging as a result of their intersecting identities and life experiences being recognized, celebrated, and uplifted (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014).

### ***Implications for Practice***

It is well documented that BGLOs provide a sense of belonging that is difficult to find in other organizations for African American college students. No matter the reasons students gain interest in joining BGLOs, it is clear that these organizations—particularly historically Black sororities—provide a space for African American women in college that is not found anywhere else on campus. As a result, institutions of higher education must become more intentional in working with these organizations and providing equitable opportunities for them across college campuses. BGLOs must be promoted during campus life events and within promotional materials as students, particularly African American women, need to be aware of all of the options available to them on campus. Historically Black sororities must also be intentional in highlighting their efforts by being involved in campus programming and initiatives that relate to women, Greek-lettered organizations, and African Americans. In addition, given that some predominantly White institutions have low numbers of African American women and historically Black sororities require sophomore status, historically Black sororities should find creative ways to partner with predominantly White institutions to ensure African American women have access to membership. Black women hold, at minimum, two fundamental marginalized identities. Uplifting them on

campus and supporting them will provide a better campus climate and a better sense of belonging on campus, and historically Black sororities appear to be one way to provide this support through membership. Beyond membership, historically Black sororities can also serve as a model for other organizations developed to support African American women.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Based on the initial findings of this pilot study, we suggest several avenues of future research that might be explored using various forms of methodological approaches (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods). For example, although this study explored what African American women gained from being a member of a historically Black sorority, more research can be conducted on the reasons African American women decide to join historically Black sororities versus non-historically Black sororities. It would also be interesting to see why African American women do not consider membership in historically Black sororities or do not join when interested given the documented benefits of these groups. In relation to our findings about the importance of family support in conjunction with membership in a historically Black sorority, we would be interested in other factors that might have influenced this finding (e.g., family income and first-generation college status). An additional component that could be explored in terms of family involvement and sorority membership is legacy status and the ways in which legacy status influences the amount of support women receive during the membership intake process.

To address one of the limitations of our study, future research could explore the difference in membership experiences of women in sororities based on age. A difference such as age could influence women's various motives to join sororities, their expectations of membership, or their level of involvement within their organization. In relation to involvement within

a sorority, future research could explore the difference of involvement between historically Black and non-historically Black sororities based on factors such as chapter size, recruitment practices, and sorority guidelines and requirements; these components of sororities may influence who is allowed to be involved and to what extent they are involved with their organization. Finally, research conducted on the experiences of African American women in non-historically Black sororities would be useful.

In conclusion, we would like to acknowledge that the aim of this study was not to promote historically Black sororities over non-historically Black sororities for African American women. Rather, its purpose was to further explore educational outcomes that may be associated with the intersectional support historically Black sororities provide. Based on existing literature and our pilot findings, historically Black sororities are unique organizations that provide needed and wanted support for African American women in college, support that is often not offered anywhere else on college campuses. African American women are not the new model minority (Kaba, 2008). This article highlights that African American women are students who need the support of policy makers, administrators, faculty, staff, peers, family, and friends, and they should not be “theoretically erased” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139) when designing support mechanisms for college students.

## Appendix A

### *Sample Questions*

1. Outside of the classroom, how many hours per week do you spend studying or completing coursework alone?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

2. Outside of the classroom, how many hours per week do you spend studying or completing coursework with friends?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

3. How many hours per week do you spend involved within cultural student organizations?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

4. How many hours per week do you spend within non-cultural student organizations?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

5. How many hours per week are you typically involved with your fraternity/sorority?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

6. Have you every participated in any of the following?
  - a. Internships (Yes/No)
  - b. Undergraduate Research (Yes/No)
  
7. Have you ever seriously considered leaving your college/university?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes
  
8. Why did you decide to remain at your institution? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Peer support
  - b. Family support
  - c. Faculty/staff support
  - d. Financial aid
  - e. Strive to succeed
  - f. Student organization involvement
  - g. I didn't know what other options were available
  - h. Other (open-ended)
  
9. Do you have a faculty or staff mentor?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
10. What is your gender?
  - a. Man
  - b. Woman
  - c. Transgender
  - d. Other
  
11. What is your class standing?
  - a. First-year
  - b. Second-year
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
  
12. What is your current age?
  - a. 18 to 20
  - b. 21 to 23
  - c. 24 to 26
  - d. 27 to 29
  - e. 30 or above

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# RISKY RECRUITMENT: HOW RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE AMONG POTENTIAL NEW SORORITY MEMBERS IS RELATED TO THEIR SELF-EFFICACY TO PREVENT SEXUAL ASSAULT AND PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTING

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*This study examined how rape myth acceptance among potential new sorority members is related to their self-efficacy to prevent sexual assault and perceptions of how their university would handle a sexual assault report. Results indicate that the more these women reported acceptance with common rape myths, the less efficacious they felt to prevent sexual assault and the less likely they were to believe the university would handle a sexual assault report adequately. Universities must therefore consider how to dispel dangerous rape myths among this unique population to ensure sorority women feel comfortable intervening in and reporting sexual assault incidents.*

The prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses is a major concern for colleges and universities. One salient point of conversation among university officials is how the fraternity/sorority community may play a role in sexual assault victimization on college campuses. Much of the research on this issue, however, has largely focused on fraternity men and their likelihood to commit sexual assault perpetration (e.g., Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Foubert, 2000; Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011), often neglecting examinations of sorority women. Women in sororities may be at higher risk of sexual assault victimization than non-sorority women (Brener, McMahon, Warren, & Douglas, 1999; Minow & Einolf, 2009; Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Weschler, 2004).

Sexual assault victimization is more likely to occur among college students in their first year of study compared to subsequent years, especially for college women. One study, for example, which surveyed a demographically-representative sample of undergraduate women in state universities in the United States, found that sexual assault victimization for all college women decreased over the course of their tenure at the university (Humphrey & White, 2000). Another study with two classes

of university women found the same results, indicating that female college women in their first year are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault victimization and possibly even more so if they are interested in joining a sorority (Krebs, Lindquist, Berzofsky, Shook-Sa, & Peterson, 2016; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003).

The types of resources made available to these young women as they transition into college life may play a major role in their ability to succeed in college. According to Schlossberg's transition theory, the perceived availability of social support (i.e., from peer networks, communities, family, etc.) is one of the key factors in how adults handle and manage life transitions such as entering college (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). Incoming college women should thus feel as though their college or university will play an adequate role in providing them with the support they need, such as when experiencing and/or reporting a sexual assault incident.

The vast majority of sexual assaults that occur on college campuses, however, are not reported to the university or other authorities, though the majority do disclose to a roommate, friend, or family member (Krebs et al., 2016). The most common reasons for not reporting are that the

victim did not think the incident was serious enough to report or they did not want any action taken. Other concerns include that students felt that they would be treated poorly by authorities or that no action would be taken (Krebs et al., 2016). These findings are also supported by the Association of American Universities' (AAU) "Campus Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct" (Cantor et al., 2015). The majority of sexual assault victims who reported to officials, however, believed that they were helpful, especially if they reported to a university official (Krebs et al., 2016).

These findings suggest that college students who experience a sexual assault are more likely to turn to peers for support than university officials, but peers may not be equipped to provide the type of support a victim needs, and, in some cases, could further victimize the victim if supporters subscribe to dangerous rape myths that imply the victim was at fault. Rape myths are misconceptions about rape and sexual assault, often unnecessarily placing blame on the victim and strongly related to sexual aggression against women and related hostile sexist attitudes (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). College students interested in joining a sorority or fraternity are more likely to report higher rape myth acceptance than other college students (Kalof, 1993; McMahan, 2010). Thus, the purpose of this article was to examine how rape myth acceptance of potential new sorority members may be related to their self-efficacy to prevent sexual assault and perceptions of how their university would handle a sexual assault report.

## Literature Review

### *Why Sorority Women Are at Higher Risk for Sexual Assault Victimization*

Several studies have found that sorority women are nearly four times as likely to experience sexual assault victimization than non-sorority women (e.g., Minow & Einolf, 2009; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). Some research suggests this

may be due to the close relationships between sorority women and fraternity men, such that fraternity men have a greater likelihood of committing sexual assault than non-fraternity men (e.g., Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991; Minow & Einolf, 2009). These sorority women may then also be less likely to report sexual assault if the perpetrator is a fraternity member, due to the strength of the bonds between fraternity men and sorority women. Reporting against a fraternity man could result in backlash from their sorority sisters within their own chapter and other members of the fraternity/sorority community, threatening the victim's established peer networks, who are also likely perceived as major sources of support.

Sorority women may also be more at risk for sexual assault than non-members due to the nature of their social activities as a member of the fraternity/sorority community. Minow and Einolf (2009) found that alcohol consumption and attendance at fraternity/sorority events where alcohol was served was positively correlated with sorority women's sexual victimization. Social events with other members of the fraternity/sorority community is a large part of the fraternity/sorority experience; thus, while attending these events is often not mandatory, they are strongly encouraged. Copenhaver and Grauerholz (1991) found that women who were most active in sorority functions were more likely than less active members to experience sexual assault during fraternity functions and/or by fraternity members. Sorority women are therefore uniquely situated in a space where the fraternity/sorority community can play a major supporting role in their initial college development and transition into college.

### *The Importance of Examining Rape Myth Acceptance among Potential New Sorority Members to Prevent Sexual Assault*

Rape myths are misconceptions about how sexual assault occurs and who is to blame (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999), such as

agreement with statements like “when girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble” and “rape happens when a guy’s sex drive goes out of control” (McMahon & Farmer, 2011, p. 77). For the purpose of this study, the term *rape* is assumed under the umbrella of *sexual assault*. Sexual assault is defined here as any nonconsensual sexual contact, including sexual penetration and touching. Rates of sexual assault vary across studies, but the recent AAU Climate Survey (Cantor et al., 2015) found that 11.7% of all students across 27 universities and nearly a fifth (16.9%) of undergraduate women in their first year experienced sexual assault.

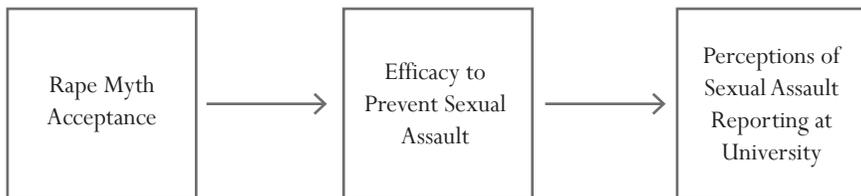
Acceptance of rape myths are strongly related to hostile sexist attitudes (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) and less of a willingness to intervene in potential sexual assault situations (i.e., bystander attitudes) (McMahon, 2010). Bystander intervention education efforts at colleges and universities often attempt to train students on how to recognize a potential assault and how to intervene, as well as increase an individual’s efficacy to intervene. A meta-analysis showed moderate effects of bystander education on both bystander efficacy and intentions to help others at risk, while smaller but significant effects of bystander education were observed for self-

reported bystander helping behaviors, lower rape proclivity (but not penetration), and rape myth supportive attitudes (Katz & Moore, 2013).

Acceptance of rape myths that assume nonverbal cues as consent may also indicate a lack of knowledge and self-efficacy to obtain verbal consent in sexual interactions, such as rape myths that indicate that women who do not physically fight back or do not verbally say no cannot claim rape (McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999). Sexual consent education programs on college campuses have shown some promise in improving the self-efficacy of students to verbally communicate consent and prevent future sexual assault (Ortiz, Shafer, & Murphy, 2015).

The following hypothesis was thus proposed to examine how rape myth acceptance is related to potential new sorority members’ self-efficacy to prevent sexual assault and perceptions of how their university would handle sexual assault reporting. See Figure 1 for the proposed model.

H1. The more accepting participants are of rape myths, (a) the less efficacious they will feel about their own ability to prevent sexual assault, and (b) thus the less likely they are to believe that the university would adequately handle a sexual assault report.



**Figure 1**  
*Proposed model*

## Methods

### *Participants and Procedures*

Participants included 802 female undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 20 ( $M = 18.23$ ,  $SD = .49$ ) who were interested in joining a social sorority at a large,

public southwestern university before the beginning of the respective fall semester term. The vast majority of participants identified their race/ethnicity as White/Caucasian (89.5%), though 5.3% of this group also identified with another racial or ethnic group (primarily Hispanic/Latina, 4.0%). An additional 8.2%

identified exclusively as Hispanic/Latina. The remaining participants identified exclusively as Asian/Pacific Islander (1.7%) or Black/African American (0.5%).

All the women were required to attend one of four information sessions about the recruitment process before they were eligible to become a potential new member. As the women arrived, before each information session began, they were asked to voluntarily complete the study's short paper-and-pencil questionnaire. If they agreed, they were then provided with a writing utensil, an information sheet about the purpose the study, and the survey questionnaire. Privacy of responses were ensured by asking participants to sit apart from one another while completing the questionnaire, and then when finished, they were asked to fold their questionnaires so that their answers could not be visible to others and drop the completed questionnaire into the open slot of a large collection box. Participation took approximately 5–10 minutes. All procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

### Measures

The questionnaire included measures of rape myth acceptance, beliefs in their abilities to handle related sexual assault, and perceptions about how the university would handle sexual assault reports.

*Rape myth acceptance* was measured using 15 items from the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Payne et al., 1999). Participants were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items included rape myth statements about female victim blaming (e.g., "If a girl acts 'slutty' (such as wearing 'slutty' clothing), eventually she is going to get into trouble" and "If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand); men's inability to control themselves (e.g., "Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they

get too sexually carried away" and "It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing"); and false reporting (e.g., "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys" and "A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it." All 15 items loaded reliably ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and were summed and averaged together ( $M = 2.00, SD = .59$ ).

*Self-efficacy about preventing sexual assault* was measured with four items that addressed the participants' sense of efficacy to prevent sexual assault by understanding what is sexual consent and being able to intervene on a potential sexual assault. They were asked on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to indicate their agreement with the following four statements: "I believe I can make a difference in preventing sexual violence at [university]," "I feel confident I could step in and help if I thought I saw signs of a sexual assault," "I have a really good understanding of what officially counts as consent to have sex," and "I feel comfortable asking someone for their verbal consent before having sex." All four items loaded reliably ( $\alpha = .75$ ) and were summed and averaged together ( $M = 4.26, SD = .66$ ).

*Sexual assault reporting perceptions* were measured with three items to assess how the participants expected the university would handle a sexual assault report. They were asked on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to indicate their agreement with three items that were listed after the following prompt: "If a student reported a sexual assault at [university], I believe it would be..." The three items included "...taken seriously," "...handled compassionately," "...and kept as private and confidential as possible." All three items loaded reliably ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and were averaged together ( $M = 4.67, SD = .54$ ).

### Results

A simple mediation model analysis was

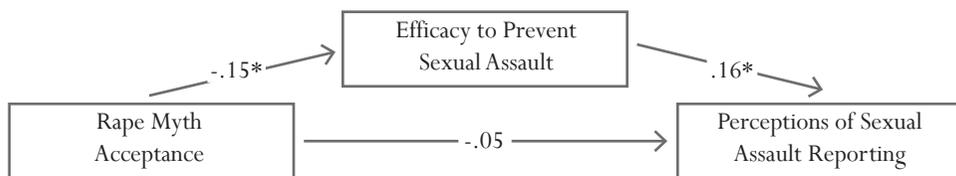
conducted, using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS SPSS macro, to test the paths between rape myth acceptance (X) and sexual assault reporting perceptions (Y) with efficacy to prevent sexual assault as the mediator. The analysis thus tested whether a significant relationship existed between potential new sorority members' rape myth acceptance and negative perceptions of the university's sexual assault reporting and whether their perceived self-efficacy to prevent sexual assault played a significant intervening role between this relationship.

H1a proposed that the more participants are accepting of rape myths, the less efficacious they will feel about preventing sexual assault. The relationship between these variables was significant in the predicted direction ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $t = -3.81$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-.2254, -.0720]). H1a was supported.

H1b proposed that the more participants are accepting of rape myths (X), the less likely they will feel that the university will handle a sexual assault report adequately (Y) when they are also more likely to feel less efficacious about

preventing sexual assault. The direct effect of X on Y was not significant ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $t = -1.59$ ,  $p = .11$ , 95% CI [-.1132, .0117]), but the indirect effect of X on Y through the mediator of efficacy to prevent sexual assault was significant ( $\beta = -.02$ , 95% CI [-.0417, -.0094]), such that the relationship between rape myth acceptance and perceptions of sexual assault reporting was significantly mediated by the participants' belief in their ability to prevent sexual assault. H1b was thus supported. See Figure 2 for each of the paths of the model and their corresponding coefficients.

These results indicate that the more accepting potential new sorority members are of rape myths, the less likely they are to feel efficacious in preventing sexual assault, and in turn, the more negative they feel about how the university would handle a sexual assault report. Rape myth acceptance and self-efficacy to prevent sexual assault were thus together indicators of how a potential new sorority member felt about the university's ability to handle a sexual assault report.



**Figure 2**  
A simple mediation model with efficacy to prevent sexual assault as a mediator between the relationship of rape myth acceptance and perceptions of how the university would handle sexual assault reporting, \*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Although most potential new sorority members did not report high rape myth acceptance and low self-efficacy to prevent sexual assault, the significant relationship between these variables and with perceptions of the university's sexual assault reporting revealed some points of concern. Potential new sorority members who were more accepting of rape

myths and felt less efficacious about preventing sexual assault were also more likely to believe that the university would not handle a sexual assault report adequately. These relationships should be concerning to college administrators, fraternity/sorority advisors, and other interested parties, because those potential new members who reported higher rape myth acceptance may also be more susceptible to sexual assault victimization while enrolled at the university

(Minow & Einolf, 2009; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). In addition, if an assault were to happen to these women or their peers, they may be less likely to report their assault or step in to prevent the assault from occurring.

As proposed by Schlossberg's transition theory, for these young women to successfully transition into the college environment, strong and adequate social support is necessary (Anderson et al., 2012; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). If colleges and universities want to foster efficacy to prevent sexual assault among potential new sorority members and improve their perceptions of the university's sexual assault reporting system, they must work at dispelling acceptance of dangerous rape myths among these young women's key support groups, namely the fraternity/sorority community. University administration and staff cannot be the sole voice of these educational efforts, as we know many young college women will turn first to their peers for support before turning to university officials.

Fraternity men can play a key part in these efforts, as sorority women's close organizational relationship to fraternity men, who often hold higher rape myth acceptance than non-fraternity college men and women (Foubert, 2000), is one way in which sorority women may be more vulnerable than other college women to sexual victimization. Sorority women sometimes also report higher rape myth acceptance than non-sorority women (Brosi, Foubert, Bannon, & Yandell, 2011; Kalof, 1993), which may be due to the close relationship between fraternity men and sorority women, such that these women may mimic the beliefs of close fraternity men as a way to strengthen the bond between their groups. The fraternity/sorority community, as a whole, may foster a unique atmosphere for the perpetuation of rape myths on campus.

As these women begin to navigate the social structures and peer networks that college offers, they may be less willing to intervene or challenge stereotypes held within their newly-formed peer

groups, especially when they are attempting to become a member of the community. During sorority recruitment, these women may also find themselves in situations where sexual assault is more likely to occur, such as fraternity parties, which are often known for having open and easy access to drugs and alcohol (Ham & Hope, 2003; Mallett, 2013). Being part of these events and attempting to join the chapter of their choice may thus hinder their willingness to clearly communicate resistance to sexual assault or step in if they witness others engaging in potential sexual assault. Universities must work at identifying ways in which potential new and current members will feel most comfortable reporting incidents of sexual assault without fear of retaliation from their chapter or the fraternity/sorority community at large.

The relationship between rape myth acceptance and self-efficacy for preventing sexual assault may also exist because some participants are not able to recognize what constitutes sexual assault or rape. Traditionally, there is little discussion of sexual consent in U.S. high schools (Lindberg, Maddow-Zimet, & Boonstra, 2016), and therefore, these young women may have never received formal education about sexual assault before college enrollment and sorority recruitment. The recruitment process can serve as an opportune time to engage potential new members of fraternities and sororities in discussions of what sexual assault looks like and how related sexist attitudes can play a role in sexual assault.

Universities are thus advised to tailor sexual assault prevention efforts to sorority women and fraternity men by taking into account the contextual complexities of fraternity/sorority membership and the role rape myth acceptance may play in the activities of their community. These efforts should address the importance of these close peer networks and work to educate sorority women and fraternity men on how to identify, prevent, and report sexual assault by incorporating peer-to-peer educational efforts

that address the unique needs of their community. Older fraternity/sorority members may be able to educate incoming new members on sexual assault issues and positively impact their safety during their most vulnerable time in college.

As potential new sorority members are most likely new to the university, they may not yet understand the policies and procedures associated with reporting sexual assault. They may also have yet to develop confidence or trust in their university, or organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). If they do not feel a strong connection to their university and hold unhealthy rape myth attitudes, they may be less likely to feel the university has the ability to handle tough, personal, and private situations like sexual assault (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). The school pride that often develops between student and university takes time, and potential new sorority members may build a connection with the fraternity/sorority community first as the recruitment process may occur before classes even begin. It is then important that universities start early, during orientation and sorority recruitment, to begin facilitating this connection between themselves and students, but the entire fraternity/sorority community must also be on board and feel as though their unique needs and concerns are considered in all educational efforts.

Future research is necessary to determine whether the significant relationships found in this study also exist among potential new and current sorority members at other universities and among samples with greater racial and ethnic diversity, as the current sample was limited to one recruitment class, and most participants identified as White. Also, all data was collected using a cross-sectional survey questionnaire and therefore causality could not be assessed between the variables of interest. Additional research should also be conducted to determine ways in which universities can best partner with the fraternity/sorority community to incorporate their unique needs in any educational efforts

to dispel dangerous rape myths and improve efficacy to prevent sexual assault.

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